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LIFE OF FLETCHER.

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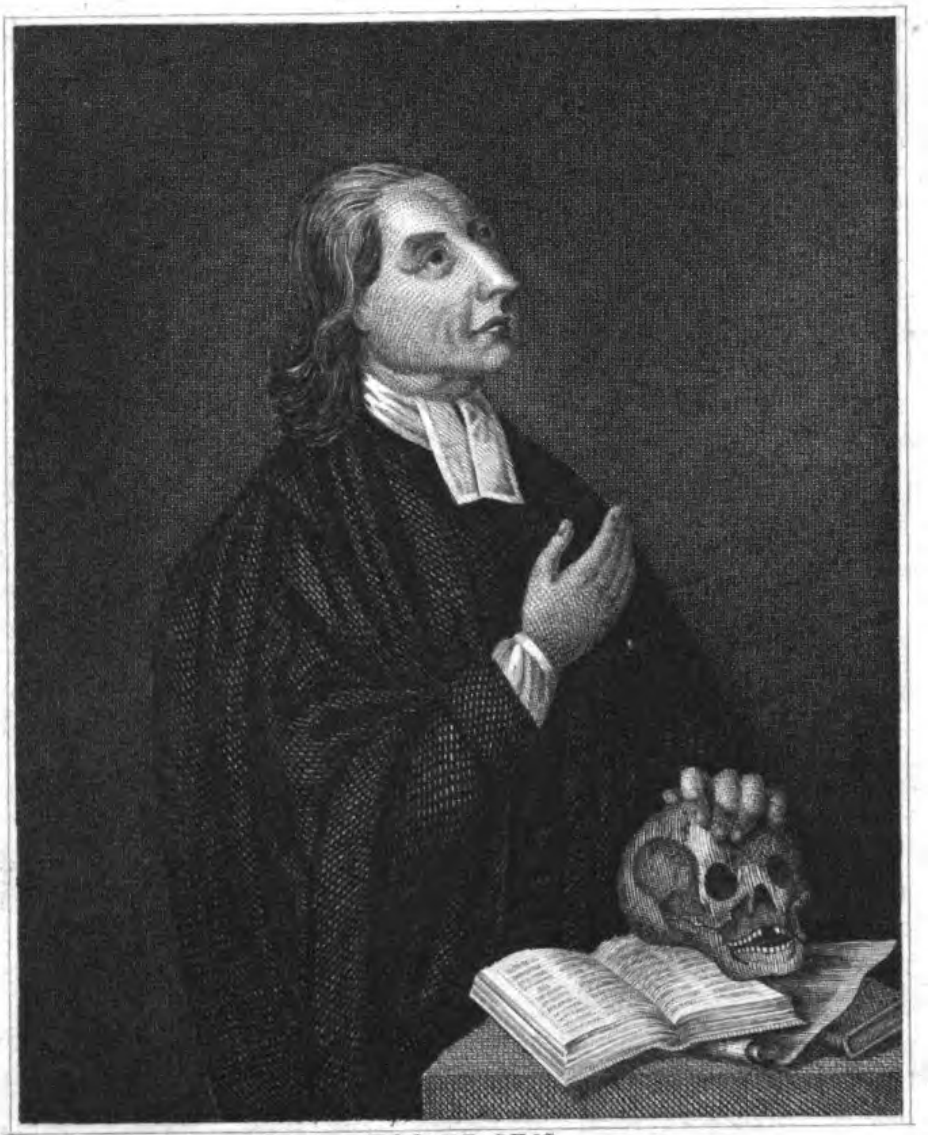

J. S. Stott. Engr Hal.x

J. Fletcher

Madeley

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THE LIFE OF THE REV.D JOHN FLETCHER, BY THE REV.D J. WESLEY.

MADELEY CHURCH

HALIFAX.
PUBLISHED BY W MILNER.

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A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND DEATH

OF THE

REV. JOHN FLETCHER:

BY THE

REV. JOHN WESLEY.

SEQUOR, NON PASSIBUS ÆQUIS!

HALIFAX:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM MILNER,
CHEAPSIDE.

MDCCCXLI.

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TO THE READER.

No man in England has had so long an acquaintance with Mr. Fletcher as myself. Our acquaintance began almost as soon as his arrival in London, about the year 1752, before he entered into Holy Orders, or (I believe) had any such intention; and it continued uninterrupted between thirty and forty years, even till it pleased God to take him to himself. Nor was ours a slight or ordinary acquaintance; but we were of one heart and of one soul; we had no secrets between us for many years; we did not purposely hide any thing from each other. From time to time he consulted me, and I him, on the most important occasions; and he constantly professed, not only much esteem, but, what I valued far more, much affection. He told me in one of his letters (I doubt not from his heart),

"Tecum vivere amem; tecum obeam lubens
With thee I gladly would both live and die"

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I therefore think myself obliged by the strongest ties to pay this small tribute to his memory. But you may easily observe, that in doing this, I am little more than a compiler; for I owe a great, if not the greatest part of the ensuing tract, to a few friends, who have been at no small pains in furnishing me with materials; and above all, to my dear friend (such she has been almost from her childhood), Mrs. Fletcher. I could easily have altered both hers and their language, while I retained their sentiments; but I was conscious I could not alter it for the better, and I would not alter for altering sake; but judged it fairest to give you most of their accounts very nearly in their own words.

Amsterdam,
September 12, 1786.

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THE

LIFE AND DEATH OF MR. FLETCHER.

CHAPTER I.

Of his Parentage and Youth.

JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE (this was properly his name) was born at Nyon, in Switzerland, a town about fifteen miles north of Geneva, on September the 12th, in the year 1729. His father was an officer in the French service, till he left the army in order to marry; but after a time he returned to the army, and was a colonel in the militia of his own country.

In his early childhood he had much of the fear of God, and great tenderness of conscience. One day having offended his father, who threatened to correct him, he did not dare to come into his presence, but retired into the garden; and when he saw him coming towards him, he ran away with all speed: but he was presently struck with deep remorse, and said to himself, "What! Do I run

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away from my father? Perhaps I shall live to have a son that will run away from *me!*" And it was several years before the impression, which he then received, was worn off.

Another instance of his tenderness of conscience occurred, when he was about seven years of age. He was one day reproved by the nursery-maid, saying, "You are a naughty boy. Do you not know, that the devil is to take away all naughty children?" He was no sooner in bed, than he began to reflect very deeply upon her words. He thought, "I *am* a naughty boy; and how do I know but God may let the devil take me away this night." He then got up and wrestled with God in prayer for a considerable time; and he would not go to bed again till he believed God had forgiven him.

The following accounts Mr. Fletcher himself gave to Mr. Samuel Webb, of London, then residing at Madeley:

"When I was a lad, I had a design to get some fruit out of my father's garden: the door being locked, I could not get in, but by climbing over the wall—this was very high; but, with some difficulty, I got to the top of it. As I was walking upon it, my foot slipped, and I fell down to the bottom; but just where I fell a large quantity of fresh-made mortar was laid—I fell exactly upon it; this broke my fall, or it might have cost me my life.

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"Once as I was swimming by myself, in a deep water, one end of a strong riband which bound my hair, getting loose I know not how, and twisting about my leg, tied me as it were, neck and heels; I strove with all my strength to disengage myself, but it was to no purpose. No person being within call, I gave myself up for lost; but when I had given over struggling, the riband loosed of itself.

"Another instance of the tender care which God had over me was as follows: One evening I and four young gentlemen, in high spirits, made a solemn agreement with each other to swim the next day to a rocky island, five miles distant from the shore; but this foolish adventure was within a very little of costing us all our lives. I and another indeed did with great difficulty and hazard swim to the island; but when we came thither, the rock was so steep and smooth that we could not possibly climb up. After swimming round several times, and making many ineffectual efforts, we thought we must perish there. But at length one of us found a place where he made a shift to crawl up. He then helped his companion after him:—the others swam about half way: a boat then took them up, when they were just sinking. Another boat, which we had ordered to follow us, afterwards came and took us home."

A still more remarkable deliverance it is, of which he gave an account in the year 1760. "Some years since I lived at a place very near the river

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Rhine. In that part it is broader than the Thames at London-bridge, and extremely rapid; but having been long practised in swimming, I made no scruple of going into it at any time: only I was always careful to keep near the shore, that the stream might not carry me away. Once, however, being less careful than usual, I was unawares drawn into the mid channel; the water there was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse. I endeavoured to swim against it, but in vain, till I was hurried far from home. When I was almost spent, I rested upon my back, and then looked about for a landing place, finding I must either land or sink. With much difficulty I got near the shore; but the rocks were so ragged and sharp, that I saw, if I attempted to land there, I should be torn in pieces; so I was constrained to turn again to the mid stream: at last despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine smooth creek, into which I was swiftly carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I did not then know to be a powder-mill. The last thing I can remember, was the striking of my head against one of the piles whereon it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more, till I rose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself, I was in a calm, safe place, perfectly well, without any soreness or weariness at all. Nothing was amiss, but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place

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where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore; one gentleman in particular, who said, 'I looked, when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side, and the time of your being immerged among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.'"

But some will say, "Why this was a miracle!" Undoubtedly it was. It was not a natural event; but a work wrought above the power of nature, probably by the ministry of angels.

When he was yet very young, his father sent him to the University of Geneva. After he had gone through the usual course of study, it was the desire of his parents that he should be a clergyman. But it was his own desire and resolution, to be an officer in the army. Not being able to gain their consent to this, he, without their consent, went away to Lisbon. Here he gathered a company of his own countrymen, accepted of a captain's commission, and engaged to serve the king of Portugal, on board a man-of-war, which was just then getting ready with all speed, in order to sail to Brazil. He then wrote to his parents, begging them to send him a considerable sum of money: of this he expected to make a vast advantage; but they refused him roughly: unmoved by this he determined to go without it, as soon as the ship sailed. But in the morning, the maid waiting on him at breakfast, let the tea-kettle fall, and so scalded his leg, that he kept his bed for a considerable time

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after. During that time, the ship sailed for Brazil; but it was observed, that the ship was heard of no more.

But how is this reconcileable with the account which has been given of his piety when he was a child? Very easily: it only shows, that his piety declined while he was at the University; (and this is too often the case of other youths in our own Universities.) But it pleased God at or before his journey to England, to lift up his head again.

His desire of being an officer in the army, continued after he returned from Lisbon. And when he was informed that his uncle, then a colonel in the Dutch service, had procured a commission for him, he joyfully set out for Flanders. But just at that time the peace was concluded; and his uncle dying quickly after, his hopes were blasted, and he gave up all thoughts of going into the army; and, being disengaged from all business, he thought it would not be amiss to spend a little time in England.

Coming to the Custom-house in London, with some other young gentlemen, none of whom could speak any English, they were treated with the utmost surliness and ill-manners, by some brutish Custom-house-officers. These not only took out, and jumbled together all the things that were in their portmanteaus; but took away their letters of recommendation, telling them, "All letters must be sent by the post." They are such saucy and ill-

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mannered wretches as these that bring up an evil report on our nation. Britons might well be styled *Hospitibus feri*, if they were all like these vermin.

From hence they went to an inn; but here they were under another difficulty; as they spoke no English, they could not tell how to exchange their foreign into English money; till Mr. Fletcher, going to the door, heard a well-drest Jew talking French. He told him the difficulty they were under, with regard to the exchange of money. The Jew replied, "Give me your money, and I will get it changed in five minutes." Mr. Fletcher without delay gave him his purse, in which were ninety pounds. As soon as he came back to his company, he told them what he had done. They all cried out with one voice, "Then your money is gone: you need never expect to see a crown or a doit of it any more. Men are constantly waiting about the doors of these inns, on purpose to take in young strangers." Seeing no remedy, no way to help himself, he could only commend his cause to God. And that was enough. Before they had done breakfast, in came the Jew, and brought him the whole money.

Inquiring for a person who was proper to perfect him in the English tongue (the rudiments of which he had begun to learn before he left Geneva), he was recommended to Mr. Burchell, who then kept a boarding-school, at South-Nimms, in Hertford-

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shire. And when Mr. Burchell removed to Hatfield, he chose to remove with him. All the time he was both at South-Nimms and at Hatfield, he was of a serious and reserved behaviour; very different from that of the other young gentlemen, who were his fellow-students. Here he diligently studied both the English language, and all the branches of polite literature. Meantime his easy and genteel behaviour, together with his eminent sweetness of temper, gained him the esteem as well as the affection, of all that conversed with him. He frequently visited some of the first families in Hatfield, who were all fond of his conversation: so lively and ingenious at the same time, evidencing both the gentleman and the scholar. All this time he had the fear of God deeply rooted in his heart; but he had none to take him by the hand, and lead him forward in the ways of God. He stayed with Mr. Burchell about eighteen months, who loved him as his own son.

Afterwards, one Mr. Deschamps, a French minister, to whom he had been recommended, procured him the place of tutor to the two sons of Thomas Hill, Esq., at Tern-Hall, in Shropshire. In the year 1752, he removed into Mr. Hill's family, and entered upon the important province of instructing the young gentlemen. He still feared God, but had not yet an experimental sense of his love: nor was he convinced of his own fallen state, till one Sunday evening a servant came in to make up his fire, while

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he was writing some music, who looking at him with serious concern, said, "Sir, I am sorry to see you so employed on the Lord's day." At first his pride was alarmed, and his resentment moved at being reproved by a servant; but upon reflection, he felt the reproof was just. He immediately put away his music, and from that very hour, became a strict observer of the Lord's-day.

I have heard two very different accounts of the manner wherein he had the first notice of the people called Methodists. But I think it reasonable to prefer to any other, that which I received from his own mouth. This was as follows:

When Mr. Hill went up to London to attend the Parliament, he took his family and Mr. Fletcher with him. While they stopped at St. Alban's, he walked out into the town, and did not return till they were set out for London. A horse being left for him he rode after, and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill asking him why he stayed behind. He said, "As I was walking I met with a poor old woman, who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away." "I shall wonder," said Mrs. H., "if our tutor does not turn *Methodist* by and by." "*Methodist*, Madam," said he, "pray what is that?" She replied, "Why, the *Methodists* are a people that do nothing but pray: they are praying all day, and all night." "Are they?" said he, "Then by the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above

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ground." He did find them out not long after, and was admitted into the society. And from this time whenever he was in town, he met in Mr. Richard Edwards's class. This he found so profitable to his soul, that he lost no opportunity of meeting; and he retained a peculiar respect for Mr. Edwards till the day of his death.

CHAPTER II.

Of his Conversion to God.

It will be most satisfactory to the serious reader, to give an account of this in his own words. They run thus: "The twelfth of January, in the year 1755, I received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, though my heart was hard as a stone. The following day I felt the tyranny of sin more than ever, and an uncommon coldness in all religious duties; I felt the burden of my corruptions heavier than ever: there was no rest in my flesh; I called upon the Lord, but with such heaviness, as made me fear it was lost labour. Many a time did I take up the Bible to seek comfort; but not being able to read, I shut it again. The thoughts which engrossed my mind were these: I am undone; I have wandered from God more than ever; I have trampled under foot the frequent convictions which God has wrought in my heart. Instead of going

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straight to Christ, I have wasted my time in fighting against sin, by the sole use of the means of grace; as if the means would do no good, without the blessing of God. I never had faith; and without faith it is impossible to please God, therefore all my thoughts, words, and works, however specious before men, are utterly sinful before God; and if I am not changed before I go hence, I am lost to all eternity.

"When I saw that all my endeavours availed nothing against my conquering sin, I almost gave up all hope, and resolved to sin on and go to hell. Yet I had a strange thought, 'If I do go to hell, I will praise God there; and since I cannot be a monument of his mercy in heaven, I will be a monument of his justice in hell.' But I soon recovered my ground: I thought Christ died for all; therefore he died for *me*. He died to pluck such sinners as I am out of the devil's teeth. And as I sincerely desire to be his, he will surely take me to himself. He will surely let me know before I die, that he has died for *me*. If he leaves me for awhile in this dreadful state, it is only to show me the depth he draws me out of. But then I thought, perhaps he will do it only at my dying hour. And must I sin on till then! How can I endure this! But I thought again, my Saviour was above three and thirty years on earth; let me wait for him as many years, and then I may have some excuse for my impatience. Does God owe me any thing?

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Is he bound to time or place? Do I deserve any thing at his hands but damnation? Yet anger was always one of the sins which I could not overcome. I went on sinning and repenting, and sinning again; but still calling on God's mercy through Christ.

"I was now beat out of all my strong holds. I felt my helplessness; and lay at the feet of Christ. I cried, 'Save me, Lord, as a brand plucked out of the fire! Give me justifying faith; for the devil will surely reign over me, till thou takest me into thy hand. I shall only be an instrument in his hand to work wickedness, till thou stretch out thy almighty hand, and save thy lost creature, by free, unmerited grace.' I seldom went to private prayer, but this thought came into my mind, 'This may be the happy hour when thou wilt prevail with God!' But still I was disappointed. I cried to God, but my heart did not go with my lips. I prayed, but often could hardly keep awake. When overcome with heaviness, I went to bed; beseeching God to spare me till the next day, that I might renew my wrestling with him, till I should prevail.

"On Sunday the nineteenth in the evening, I heard an excellent sermon on these words: '*Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*' I heard it attentively, but my heart was not moved; I was only still more convinced, that I was an unbeliever, and that till I had faith, I should never have peace. The hymn after sermon suited the subject; but I could not join in

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singing it; so I sat mourning while others rejoiced. I went home, still resolving to wrestle with the Lord like Jacob, till I should beome a prevailing Israel.

"I begged of God the following day, to show me the wickedness of my heart. I besought him to increase my convictions; for I was afraid I did not mourn enough for my sins. But I found relief in Mr. Wesley's journal, where I learned that we should not build on what we felt, but go to Christ with all our sins, and all our hardness of heart. On the twenty-first I wrote down part of what filled my heart, namely, a confession of my sins, misery, and helplessness, together with a resolution to seek Christ even unto death. In the evening I read the scriptures, and found a sort of pleasure, in seeing a picture of my own wickedness exactly drawn in the third of the Romans, and that of my present condition in the seventh. I often wished to be acquainted with somebody who had been in my condition, and resolved to seek for one to whom I might unbosom my whole soul. On Thursday Satan beset me hard: I sinned, and grievously too; and now I almost gave up all hope: I was on the brink of despair; and nevertheless continued to fall into sin, as often as I had temptation. But I must observe, that though I frequently thought hell would be my portion, yet I never was much afraid of it: whether this was owing to a secret hope, or to hardness of heart, I know not; but I was continually crying out, 'What stupidity! I see

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myself hanging over hell, as it were by a single thread! And yet I am not afraid, but sin on! O, what is man without the grace of God! A very devil in wickedness, though inferior to him in power! In the evening I went to a sincere friend, and told him something of my state; he endeavoured to administer comfort; but it was not suited to my state. When we parted he gave me some advice, which was better suited to my condition. 'God,' said he, 'is merciful. God loves you, and if he denies you any thing it is for your good. You deserve nothing at his hands; but wait patiently for him, and never give up your hope.' I went home, resolved to follow his advice, though I should stay till death.

"I proposed to receive the Lord's Supper on the following Sunday. I therefore returned to my room, and looked out a sacramental hymn; I learned it by heart, and prayed it over many times, intending to repeat it at the table. Then I went to bed with rather more hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked, though I slept: I dreamed I had committed a grievous and abominable sin: I awaked amazed and confounded, but fell upon my knees and prayed with more faith than usual: and afterwards went about my business with an uncommon cheerfulness. It was not long before I was tempted by my besetting sin: but I found it had no power; my soul was not even ruffled. I took no notice of this at first. But hav-

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ing withstood the temptation again and again, I perceived it was the Lord's doing. Afterwards it was suggested, it is presumption for such a sinner to hope for so great a mercy. I prayed that I might not be in a delusion; and the more I prayed, the more clearly I saw it was real. For though sin stirred all the day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord.

"In the evening I read the experience of some of God's children, and found mine agreed with theirs, hereby my faith was strengthened, and my hope considerably increased: I entreated the Lord to deal with his servant according to his mercy, and take all the glory to himself. I prayed earnestly, and was persuaded I should have peace with God, and dominion over sin: not doubting but the full assurance also would be given in God's good time. I continued calling on him for an increase of faith (for still I had some fear of being in a delusion); and having continued my supplication till near one in the morning, I opened my Bible on these words, '*Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He will not suffer the righteous to be moved.*' Filled with joy, I fell upon my knees, to beg of God that I might always cast my burden upon him. My hope was now greatly increased, and I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin, hell, and all manner of affliction.

"With this comfortable promise I shut up my Bible, being now perfectly satisfied. As I shut it,

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I cast my eyes on these words, "*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it.*" So having asked grace of God to serve him till death, I went cheerfully to bed."

So far we have Mr. Fletcher's own account under his own hand. From this time he *had the witness in himself;* he knew that he had *redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins:* but he still continued pleading with the Lord to take a fuller possession of his heart; till one day, as he was in earnest prayer, lying prostrate on his face before God, he saw, as it were, our blessed Lord hanging and bleeding on the cross; and at the same time these words were spoken with power to his heart:

"Seiz'd by the rage of sinful men,
I see him bound, and bruis'd, and slain:
'Tis done! The martyr dies!
His life, to ransom ours is given:
And lo! the fiercest fire of heav'n
Consumes the sacrifice.

He suffers both from men and God!
He bears the universal load
Of guilt and misery!
He suffers to reverse our doom:
And lo! my Lord is here become
The bread of life to me!"

I believe this was in January, 1754, in the second year after he removed to Tern. Now all his bonds were broken; he breathed a purer air, and was able to say with confidence, "*The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*" By means of this faith, sin was under his feet. Knowing in whom he had be-

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lieved, he could continually triumph in the Lord, and praise the God of his salvation.

From this time he walked cheerfully, as well as valiantly in the ways of God! He closely followed his Master, *denying himself, and taking up his cross daily.* And thinking he had not leisure in the day for the great work which he had in hand, he made it an invariable rule to sit up two whole nights in a week. These he dedicated to reading, meditation, and prayer, in order to enter more deeply into that communion with the Father and the Son, which was the delight of his soul. Meantime he lived entirely on vegetable food, and for some time on bread, with milk and water. None can doubt if these austerities were well intended; but it seems they were not well judged: it is probable they gave the first wound to an excellent constitution, and laid the foundation of many infirmities, which nothing but death could cure.

CHAPTER III.

From his Conversion to his settling at Madeley.

It was not long after he had himself *tasted the powers of the world to come,* that he was prest in spirit to exhort others to seek after the same blessing; and he was the more strongly excited to this by seeing the world all around him *lying in wick-*

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edness. Being deeply sensible of the goodness of God on the one hand, and the misery of mankind on the other, he found an earnest longing

> "To pluck poor brands out of the fire,
> To snatch them from the verge of hell."

This he began to do a considerable time before he was admitted into Holy Orders: and even his first labours of love were far from being in vain;—for though he was by no means perfect in the English tongue, particularly with regard to the pronunciation of it; yet the earnestness with which he spoke (seldom to be found in English preachers), and the unspeakably tender affection to poor undone sinners, which breathed in every word and gesture, drew multitudes of people to hear him; and by the blessing of God, his word made so deep an impression on their hearts, that very few went empty away.

From this time, till he undertook the direct care of souls, he used to be in London during the sitting of the parliament, and the rest of the year at Tern-Hall, (as it was then called) instructing the young gentlemen. Every Sunday he attended the parish church, at Atcham; but when the service was ended, instead of going home in the coach, which was always ready, he usually took a solitary walk by the Severn side, and spent some time in meditation and prayer. A pious domestic of Mr. Hill's, having frequently observed him, one Sunday desired leave to walk with him, which he constantly did

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from that time. The account which he (Mr. Vaughan, still living in London) gives of Mr. Fletcher is as follows: "It was our ordinary custom, when the church service was over, to retire into the most lonely fields or meadows, where we frequently either kneeled down or prostrated ourselves upon the ground. At those happy seasons I was a witness of such pleadings and wrestlings with God, such exercises of faith and love, as I have not known in any one ever since. The consolations which we then received from God induced us to appoint two or three nights in a week, when we duly met, after his pupils were asleep. We met also constantly on Sunday, between four and five in the morning. Sometimes I stepped into his study on other days. I rarely saw any book before him besides the Bible and the Christian Pattern. And he was seldom in any other company, unless when necessary business required, besides that of the unworthy writer of this paper.

"When he was in the country he used to visit an officer of excise at Atcham, to be instructed in singing. On my desiring him to give me some account of what he recollected concerning Mr. Fletcher, he answered thus: 'As to that man of God, Mr. Fletcher, it is but little that I remember of him; it being above nine and twenty years since the last time I saw him. But this I well remember, his conversation with me was always sweet and savoury. He was too wise to suffer any of

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his precious moments to be trifled away. When there was company to dine at Mr. Hill's, he frequently retired into the garden, and contentedly dined on a piece of bread, and a few bunches of currants. Indeed, in his whole manner of living, he was a pattern of abstemiousness. Meantime, how great was his sweetness of temper and heavenly-mindedness! I never saw it equalled in any one. How often, when I parted with him at Tern-Hall, have his eyes and hands been lifted up to heaven, to implore a blessing upon me, with fervour and devoutness unequalled by any I every saw! I firmly believe he has not left in this land, or perhaps in any other, one luminary like himself. I conclude, wishing this light may be so held up, that many may see the glory thereof, and be transformed into its likeness. May you and I, and all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, be partakers of that holiness which was so conspicuous in him!'

"Our interviews for singing and conversation (continues Mr. Vaughan, who was often present on these occasions) were seldom concluded without prayer. In which we were frequently joined by her that is now my wife (then a servant in the family); as likewise by a poor widow in the village, who had also known the power of God unto salvation, and who died, some years since, praising God with her latest breath. These were the only persons in the country whom he chose for his familiar friends: but he sometimes walked over to

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Shrewsbury, to see Mrs. Glynne, or Mr. Appleton, (who likewise now rests from his labours, after having many years adorned the gospel). He also visited any of the poor in the neighbourhood, that were upon a sick bed ; and when no other person could be procured, performed even the meanest offices for them."

It was in the year 1757, that he was ordained both deacon and priest. He was ordained at Whitehall ; and the same day being informed that I had no one to assist me at West-street chapel, he came away as soon as ever the ordination was over, and assisted me in the administration of the Lord's Supper. He was now doubly diligent in preaching, not only in the Chapels at West-street and Spital-fields, but wherever the providence of God opened a door to proclaim the everlasting gospel. This he frequently did, not only in English, but likewise in French, his native language : of which he was allowed by all competent judges to be a complete master.

"The first time," says Mr. Vaughan, "he preached in the country, was at Atcham church, on June 19, 1757. His text was James, iv. 4 :—(a very bold beginning) !—'*Ye adulterers and adultresses, know ye not, that the friendship of this world is enmity against God?*" The congregation stood amazed, and gazed upon him, as if he had been a monster ; but to *me* he appeared as a messenger sent from heaven."

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It was not soon that he was invited again to preach in Atcham church—but he was invited to preach in several other churches in the neighbourhood. He was first invited to preach at Wroxeter, and afterwards, at the Abbey-church in Shrewsbury. But not being yet perfect in the English tongue, he wrote down all the sermons he preached in churches. But I doubt whether he preached above six times in the six months while he stayed in the country. On my telling him, I wished he had more opportunities of preaching in this unenlightened part of the land, he answered, "The will of God be done: I am in his hands, and if he does not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer, and praise."

In the year 1758, there were many French prisoners on their parole at Tun-bridge. Being desired to preach to them in their own language, he readily complied. Many of them appeared to be deeply affected, and earnestly requested that he would preach to them every Lord's day: but some advised them first to present a petition to the bishop of London for leave. They did so; and (who would believe it)? the good bishop peremptorily rejected their petition! If I had known this at the time, King George should have known it; and I believe he would have given the bishop little thanks. An odd incident followed—a few months after, the bishop died of a cancer in his mouth. Perhaps some may think this was a just retribution, for si-

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lencing such a prophet, on such an occasion! I am not ashamed to acknowledge this is my own sentiment; and I do not think it any breach of charity to suppose, that an action so unworthy a Christian bishop had its punishment in this world.

When he returned from London, in the same year, he was more frequently invited to preach in several of the neighbouring churches; and before his quitting the country, he gave me a few printed papers, entitled, "A Christmas-box for Journeymen and Apprentices." I mention it the rather, because, I suppose, this was the first thing which he ever published.

It was in the beginning of June, 1759, that he returned the last time, from London to Tern-Hall; and being now less frequently called to public duty, he enjoyed his beloved retirement, giving himself up to study, meditation, and prayer, and walking closely with God. Indeed his whole life was now a life of prayer; and so intensely was his mind fixed upon God, that I have heard him say, "I would not move from my seat, without lifting up my heart to God." Wherever we met, if we were alone, his first salute was, "Do I meet you praying?" and if we were talking on any point of divinity, when we were in the depth of our discourse, he would often break off abruptly, and ask, "Where are our hearts now?" If ever the misconduct of an absent person was mentioned, his usual reply was, "Let us pray for him."

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It was, as I remember, about the close of this summer, that he was frequently desired, sometimes to assist, at other times to perform the whole service for Mr. Chambers, then vicar of Madeley. On these occasions, it was, that he contracted such an affection for the people of Madeley, as nothing could hinder from increasing more and more to the day of his death. While he officiated at Madeley, as he still lived at the hall, ten miles distant from it, a groom was ordered to get a horse ready for him every Sunday morning,—but so great was his aversion for giving trouble to any one, that if the groom did not wake at the time, he seldom would suffer him to be called, but prepared the horse for himself.

In answer to some queries concerning him, a gentleman, who was intimately acquainted with him for many years, wrote to me as follows:

"Dear Sir,

"My aversion to writing letters increases with my declining years; and yet I most willingly pay this debt to the precious memory of an old friend. I dwelt near him only two or three years—but our intimacy was great—and perhaps, I may be able to present you with some particulars which you have not seen before.

"About the year 1760, he showed me, at his lodgings, a rope with pullies, which he used for exercise; and added with a smile, that the devil, often tempted him to hang himself therewith. I

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said, 'The desire of women is a temptation far more dangerous than this.' He answered with surprise (or rather, as it seeemed to me, with a degree of contempt), 'In all my life I never felt that temptation: no, not in any degree.' But it is dangerous for a Christian, how great or good soever he may be, to despise another for being tempted. When we met again he acknowledged he had been plagued like other men, with that formerly unknown temptation."

In the same year the living of Madeley fell vacant, and Mr. Fletcher was presented to it, which he accepted in preference to another that was of double the value. He embraced it as his peculiar charge —the object of his most tender affection; and he was now at leisure to attend to it, being fully discharged from his former employment; for his pupils were removed to Cambridge: the elder of them died about the time of his coming of age. The younger first represented the town of Salop (as his father had done) and afterwards the county, till he took his seat in the house of Peers, as Baron Berwick, of Atcham-house; this is now the name that is given to what was formerly called Tern-Hall.

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CHAPTER IV.

From his settling at Madeley, to his leaving Trevecka.

He settled at Madeley, according to his desire, in the year 1760; and from the beginning, he was a laborious workman in his Lord's vineyard. At his first settling there, the hearts of several were unaccountably set against him; insomuch that he was constrained to warn some of these—that if they did not repent, God would speedily cut them off; and the truth of those predictions was shown over and over, by the signal accomplishment of them. But no opposition could hinder him from going on in his Master's work, and suppressing vice, in every possible manner. Those sinners, who endeavoured to hide themselves from him, he pursued to every corner of his parish, by all sorts of means, public and private, early and late, in season and out of season, entreating and warning them to flee from the wrath to come. Some made it an excuse, for not attending the church service on a Sunday morning, that they could not awake early enough, to get their families ready. He provided for this also;—taking a bell in his hand, he set out every Sunday, at five in the morning, and went round the most distant parts of the parish, inviting all the inhabitants to the house of God.

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Yet notwithstanding all the pains he took, he saw for some time, little fruit of his labour, insomuch, that he was more than once in doubt—whether he had not mistaken his place—whether God had indeed called him to confine himself to one town, or to labour more at large in his vineyard. He was not free from this doubt, when a multitude of people flocked together at a funeral—he seldom let these awful opportunities slip, without giving a solemn exhortation—at the close of the exhortation which was then given, one man was so grievously offended, that he could not refrain from breaking out into scurrilous, yea, menacing language: but notwithstanding all his struggling against it, the word fastened upon his heart—at first indeed, he roared like a lion; but he soon wept like a child. Not long after he came to Mr. Fletcher, in the most humble manner, asking pardon for his outrageous behaviour, and begging an interest in his prayers. This was such a refreshment as he stood in need of; and it was but a short time, before this poor broken-hearted sinner was filled with joy unspeakable. He then spared no pains in exhorting his fellow-sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

It was not long after, when one Sunday evening, Mr. Fletcher, after performing the usual duty at Madeley, was about to set out for Madeley-wood, to preach and catechise as usual! but just then, notice was brought (which should have been given before)

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that a child was to be buried. His waiting till the child was brought prevented his going to the wood, and herein the providence of God appeared—for at this very time many of the colliers, who neither feared God, nor regarded men, were baiting a bull, just by the preaching-house ; and having had plenty of drink, they had all agreed, as soon as he came, *to bait the parson*—part of them were appointed to pull him off his horse, and the rest to set the dogs upon him. One of these very men afterwards confessed, that he was with them when this agreement was made ; and that afterwards, while they were in the most horrid manner cursing and swearing at their disappointment, a large china punch-bowl, which held above a gallon, without any apparent cause (for it was not touched by any person or thing), fell all to shivers. This so alarmed him, that he forsook all his companions, and determined to save his own soul.

From the beginning he did not confine his labours to his own parish. For many years he regularly preached at places, eight, ten, or sixteen miles off; returning the same night, though he seldom got home before one or two in the morning. At a little society, which he had gathered about six miles from Madeley, he preached two or three times a week, beginning at five in the morning. As for visiting the sick, this was a work for which he was always ready. If he heard the knocker, in the coldest winter night, his window was thrown open

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in a moment; and when he understood either that some one was hurt in the pit, or that a neighbour was likely to die, no consideration was ever had of the darkness of the night, or the severity of the weather; but this answer was always given, "I will attend to you immediately."

But in one respect, Mr. Fletcher has frequently been blamed; namely, for deserting a place where God had eminently owned him—I mean Trevecka, in Wales. I believe it is therefore my bounden duty to clear up the whole affair; and I cannot do this better than by transcribing the substance of an account, which I have received from Mr. Benson, in answer to my inquiries:

"My acquaintance with him," says he, "commenced when I was at Kingswood, I think in the year 1768. As he now and then made a short excursion from Madeley to Bath or Bristol: in one of those excursions we invited him to give us a sermon at Kingswood. He was peculiarly assisted while he was applying those encouraging words, '*Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.*' The people were exceedingly affected; indeed quite melted down. The tears streamed so fast from the eyes of the poor colliers, that their grizzly, black faces, were washed by them, and almost universally streaked with white. And, as to himself, his zealous soul had been carried out so far beyond his strength, that when he concluded, he put off a shirt which was as wet as if it had been

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dipped in water ;—but this was nothing strange—whenever he preached it was generally the case. From this time I conceived a particular esteem for him, chiefly on account of his piety ; and wished much for a greater intimacy with him—a blessing which I soon after obtained.

" For about this time the Countess of Huntingdon erected a seminary at Trevecka, in Wales, in order to educate pious young men, of whatever denomination, for the ministry. She proposed to admit only such as were convicted to God, and resolved to dedicate themselves to his service. They were at liberty to stay there three years : during which they were to have their education gratis, with every necessary of life, and a suit of clothes once a year : afterwards, those who desired it, might enter into the ministry, either in the Established Church of England, or among Protestants of any other denomination. From the high opinion which the Countess had of Mr. Fletcher's piety, learning, and abilities for such an office, she invited him to undertake the direction of that seminary. Not that he could promise to be chiefly resident there, much less constantly. His duty to his own flock at Madeley would by no means admit of this. But he was to attend as often as he conveniently could ; to give advice, with regard to the appointment of masters, the admission or exclusion of students, to oversee their studies and conduct, to assist their piety, and judge of their qualifications for the work of the ministry.

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"As Mr. Fletcher greatly approved of the design, especially considering, first, That none were to be admitted but such as feared God; and secondly, That, when they were prepared for it, they might enter into the ministry, wherever providence opened a door, he readily complied with the invitation, and undertook the charge. This he did without fee or reward, from the sole motive of being useful in the most important work of training up persons for the glorious office of preaching the gospel. And some months after, with the same view, through his means, and in consequence of your recommendation to her ladyship, I was made head master of the school, or, as it was commonly called, the college; though I could very ill be spared from Kingswood, where I had acted in that capacity about four years.

"As yet I was greatly wanted at Kingswood. I had likewise a term to keep at Oxford; so that I could only pay them a short visit in January, 1770; but in spring I went to reside there. And for some time, things went on excellently well. The young men were serious, and made a considerable progress in learning; and many of them seemed to have a talent for preaching. Mr. Fletcher visited them frequently, and was received as an angel of God. It is not possible for me to describe the veneration in which we all held him. Like Elijah in the schools of the prophets, he was revered; he was loved; he was almost adored; and that not only by every student, but by every member of the

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family. And indeed, he was worthy. Forgive me, my dear Sir, if you think I exceed. My heart kindles while I write. Here it was that I saw, shall I say, an angel in human flesh? I should not far exceed the truth if I said so. But here I saw a descendant of fallen Adam, so fully raised above the ruins of the fall, that though by the body he was tied down to earth, yet was his whole *conversation in heaven:* yet was his *life*, from day to day, *hid with Christ in God.* Prayer, praise, love, and zeal, all ardent, elevated, above what one would think attainable in this state of frailty, were the element in which he himself continually lived. And as to others, his one employment was to call, entreat, and urge them, to ascend with him to the glorious source of being and blessedness. He had leisure comparatively for nothing else. Languages, arts, sciences, grammar, rhetoric, logic, even divinity itself, as it is called, were all laid aside, when he appeared in the school-room, among the students. His full heart would not suffer him to be silent. He *must* speak, and they were readier to hearken to this servant and minister of Jesus Christ, than to attend to Sallust, Virgil, Cicero, or any Latin or Greek historian, poet, or philosopher they were reading; and they seldom hearkened long before they were all in tears, and every heart catched fire from the flame that burnt in his soul.

"These seasons generally terminated in this:—being convinced that to be *filled with the Holy*

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Ghost was a better qualification for the ministry of the Gospel than any classical learning, (though that too may be useful in its place). After speaking a while in the school-room, he used frequently to say, 'As many of you as are athirst for this fulness of the spirit, follow me into my room.' On this, many of us have instantly followed him, and there continued till noon, wrestling like Jacob, for the blessing: praying one after another, till we could bear to kneel no longer. This was not done once or twice, but many times. And I have sometimes seen him, on these occasions, once in particular, so filled with the love of God, that he could contain no more; but cried out, 'O my God, withhold thy hand, or the vessel will burst.' But he afterwards told me, he was afraid he had grieved the spirit of God; and that he ought rather to have prayed, that the Lord would have enlarged the vessel, or have suffered it to break, that the soul might have no farther bar or interruption to its enjoyment of the supreme Good.*

"Such was the ordinary employment of this man of God, while he remained at Trevecka. He preached the word of life to the students and family, and as

* This is certainly a just remark. The proper prayer on such an occasion would have been,

Give me the enlarg'd desire,
And open, Lord, my soul,
Thy own fulness to require,
And comprehend the whole!

Stretch my faith's capacity
Wider, and yet wider still:
Then with all that is in thee
My ravish'd spirit fill!

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many of the neighbours as desired to be present. He was *instant in season, out of season* he *reproved, rebuked, exhorted with all long-suffering*. He was always employed, either in discovering some important truth, or exhorting to some neglected duty, or administering some needful comfort, or relating some useful anecdote, or making some profitable remark or observation upon any thing that occurred. And his devout soul, always burning with love and zeal, led him to intermingle prayer with all he said. Meanwhile his manner was so solemn, and at the same time so mild and insinuating, that it was hardly possible for any one who had the happiness of being in his company, not to be struck with awe, and charmed with love, as if in the presence of an angel or departed spirit. Indeed I frequently thought, while attending to his heavenly discourse and divine spirit, that he was so different from, and superior to, the generality of mankind, as to look more like Moses or Elijah, or some prophet, or apostle come again from the dead, than a mortal man, dwelling in a house of clay. It is true, his weak and long-afflicted body proclaimed him to be human; but the graces which so eminently filled and adorned his soul, manifested him to be divine. And long before his happy spirit returned to God that gave it, that which was human, seemed in a great measure, to be *swallowed up of life*. O, what a loss did Trevecka sustain! what an irreparable loss, when he left it!

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"But why then did he leave it? Why did he give up an office for which he was so perfectly well qualified, which he executed so entirely to the satisfaction of all the parties wherewith he was concerned, and in which it had pleased God to give so manifest a blessing to his labours? Perhaps it would be better, in tenderness to some persons, eminent for piety and usefulness, to let that matter remain still under the veil, which forgiving love has cast over it. But if it be thought that justice to his character, and to the cause which, from that time, he so warmly espoused and so ably defended, requires some light to be cast upon it, it may be the most inoffensive way to do it in his own words.*

"The following is an exact copy of all that is material in a letter he wrote to me, in consequence of my dismission from the office I had been in."

"June 7, 1771.

"Dear Sir,

"The same post brought me yours, and two from my lady, and one from Mr. Williams, (the new master). Those contained no charges, but general ones, which, with me, go for nothing. If the procedure you mention, is fact, and your letter is a fair account of the transaction and words, relative to your discharge, a false step has been taken. I

* It will be proper to observe here, for the better understanding of the following letter, that some time before Mr. Fletcher quitted Trevecka, Mr. Benson had been discharged from his office there: not for any defect of learning or piety, or any fault found with his behaviour: but wholely and solely because he did not believe the doctrine of Absolute Predestination.

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write, this post, to her ladyship on the affair, with all possible plainness. If the plan of the college is overthrown, I have nothing more to say to it. I will keep to my text, for one—I trust I shall ever be a servant of all—the confined tool of any one party, I never was, and never will be. If the blow that should have been struck at *the dead spirit*, is struck (contrary to the granted *liberty of sentiment*) at *dead* Arminius, or *absent* Mr. Wesley—if a master is turned away without any fault, it is time for me to stand up with firmness, or to withdraw."

"The following paragraphs are transcribed from Mr. Fletcher's letter to my lady."

"Mr. Benson made a very just defence, when he said, 'He did hold with me the possibility of salvation for all men.' If this is what you call Mr. Wesley's opinion and Arminianism, and if 'every Arminian must quit the college,' I am actually discharged. For, in my present view of things, I must hold that sentiment, if I believe that the Bible is true, and that God is love."

"For my part, I am no party man. In the Lord I am your servant, and that of your every student. But I cannot give up the honour of being connected with my old friends, who, notwithstanding their failings, are entitled to my respect, gratitude, and affection. Mr. Wesley shall always be welcome to my pulpit, and I thall gladly bear my testimony in his, as well as Mr. Whitefield's. If you forbid your students to preach for the one, and offer them

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to preach for the other; and if a master is discarded for believing that Christ died for all, then, prejudice reigns, charity is cruelly wounded, and party-spirit shouts, prevails, triumphs."

"Two days after," continues Mr. Benson, "he writes, 'I am determined to stand or fall with the liberty of the college. As I entered it a free place, I must quit it the moment it is a harbour for party-spirit.

"This he was soon constrained to do, as appears from the following letter, wrote about two months after:"

"My dear friend,

"On my arrival at the college, I found all very quiet, I fear through the enemy's keeping his goods in peace. While I preached the next day I found myself as much shackled as ever I was in my life; and after private prayer, I concluded I was not in my place. The same day I resigned my office to my lady; and on Wednesday, to the students and the Lord.

"Mr. Shirley has sent my lady a copy of part of the minutes of the last conference, (viz. of the year 1770). They were called *horrible* and *abominable*. My lady told me 'She must *burn* against them; and that whoever did not fully disavow them must quit the college.' She accordingly ordered the master and all the students to write their sentiments upon them without reserve.—I did so—explained them according to Mr. Wesley's sentiments, and approv-

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ed the doctrine, though not cautiously worded. I concluded by observing, That as after such a step on my part, and such a declaration on my lady's, I could no longer, as an honest man, stay in the college ;—I took my leave of it, wishing my lady might find a minister to preside over it less insufficient than

JOHN FLETCHER.

"These were his reasons for resigning his charge at Trevecka. As the *Circular Letter* now went abroad under the name of Mr. Shirley, inviting the Clergy of all denominations, to assemble in a body at Bristol, to oppose you and the preachers met in Conference, and oblige you to revoke the *dreadful heresies* contained in those minutes ; and as Mr. Fletcher thought the churches throughout Christendom to be verging very fast toward Antinomianism, he thought the propositions contained in those minutes ought rather to be confirmed than revoked : and as he now retired to his parish, he had more leisure for such a work than before. So after much prayer and consideration, he determined to write in defence of them. In how able a manner he did this, I need not tell any that have read those incomparable writings ; I know not how to give the character of them better, than in the words of Dr. D——, to whom I sent Mr. Fletcher's Checks, with a recommendatory letter. He answered me :

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"Dear Sir,

"When I first read yours, I must own I suspected your friendship for Mr. Fletcher had made you too lavish in your commendation of his writings, and that when I came to read them, I should find some abatements necessary to be made. But now I have read them, I am far from thinking you have spoken extravagantly; or, indeed, that too much can be said in commendation of them.

"I had not read his first letter, before I was so charmed with the spirit, as well as abilities of the writer, that the gushing tear could not be hindered from giving full testimony of my heart-felt satisfaction. Perhaps some part of this pleasure might arise from finding my own sentiments so fully embraced by the author. But sure I am, the greatest share of it arose, from finding those benevolent doctrines so firmly established; and that with such judgment, clearness, and precision, as are seldom, very seldom, to be met with. What crowns the whole, is, the amiable and Christian temper, which those who will not be convinced, must, however, approve, and wish that their own doctrines 'may be constantly attended with the same spirit.'"

How much good has been occasioned by the publication of that *Circular Letter!* This was the happy occasion of Mr. Fletcher writing those "Checks to Antinomianism:" in which one knows not which to admire most—the *purity* of the language (such as scarce any foreigner wrote before),

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the *strength* and *clearness* of the argument, or the *mildness* and *sweetness* of the spirit that breathes throughout the whole; insomuch that I nothing wonder at a serious clergyman, who, being resolved to live and die in his own opinion, when he was pressed to read them, replied, "No, I will never read Mr. Fletcher's checks; for if I did I should be of his mind."

A short extract from another of his letters will show what was his state of mind at this crisis. "How much water," says he, "may at last rush out from a little opening! What are our dear l—'s jealousies come to! Ah, poor college! Their conduct, among other reasons, has stirred me up to write in defence of the minutes. Methinks I dream, when I reflect, I have wrote controversy! The last subject I thought I should meddle with. I expect to be roughly handled on the account.—Lord, prepare me for every thing thou callest me to!

J. F."

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CHAPTER V.

From his leaving Trevecka, to his going to Bristol.

THE frequent journies he took to and from Trevecka, while he presided over the college, in all weathers, and at all seasons of the year, farther impaired the firmness of his constitution. And in some of those journies, he had not only difficulties, but dangers, likewise, to encounter. One day, as he was riding over a wooden bridge, just as he got to the middle thereof, it broke in. The mare's fore-legs sunk into the river, but her breast and hinder parts were kept up by the bridge. In that position she lay, as still as if she had been dead, till he got over her neck, and took off his bags, in which were several manuscripts, the spoiling of which would have occasioned him much trouble. He then endeavoured to raise her up, but she would not stir, till he went over the other part of the bridge—but no sooner did he set his foot upon the ground, than she began to plunge. Immediately the remaining part of the bridge broke down, and sunk with her into the river; but presently she rose up again, swam out, and came to him.

About this time, Mr. Pilmoor being desirous to see the inside of a coal-pit, Mr. Fletcher went with him to the bottom of a sloping pit, which was supposed to be near a mile under the ground. They

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returned out of it without any inconvenience. But the next day, while several colliers were there, a damp took fire, which went off with a vast explosion, and killed all the men that were in it.

In February, 1773, I received from him the following letter:

"Rev. and dear Sir,

"I hope the Lord, who has so wonderfully stood by you hitherto, will preserve you to see many of your sheep, and me among them, enter into rest. Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, by the Lord's assistance, to help your brother to gather the wreck, and keep together those who are not absolutely bent to throw away the Methodist doctrines and discipline, as soon as he that now letteth is removed out of the way. Every help will then be necessary, and I shall not be backward to throw in my mite. In the meantime you sometimes need an assistant to serve tables, and occasionally to fill up a gap. Providence visibly appointed *me* to that office many years ago. And though it no less evidently called me hither, yet I have not been without doubt, especially for some years past, whether it would not be expedient that I should resume my office as your deacon; not with any view of presiding over the Methodists after you; but to ease you a little in your old age, and to be in the way of recovering, perhaps doing more good. I have sometimes thought how shameful it was that no clergyman should join you, to keep in the church

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the work God has enabled you to carry on therein; and as the little estate I have in my own country is sufficient for my maintenance, I have thought I would one day or other offer you and the Methodists my free service. While my love of retirement made me linger, I was providentially led to do something in Lady Huntingdon's plan. But being shut out there, it appears to me, I am again called to my first work. Nevertheless, I would not leave this place, without a fuller persuasion that the time is *quite* come. Not that God uses me much here, but I have not yet sufficiently cleared my conscience from the blood of all men. Meantime I beg the Lord to guide me by his counsel, and make me willing to go any where, or no where, to be any thing, or nothing.

"Help by your prayers, till you can bless by word of mouth,

Rev. and dear Sir,
Your willing, though unprofitable, Servant
in the Gospel,
J. F.

"Madeley, February 6,
1773."

"Providence," says he, "visibly appointed me to that office many years ago." Is it any wonder then that he should now be *in doubt*, whether he did right in confining himself to one spot? The more I reflect upon it, the more I am convinced he had great reason to doubt of this. I can never believe

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it was the will of God, that such a burning and shining light should be *hid under a bushel.* No: instead of being confined to a country village, it ought to have shone in every corner of our land. He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation, as Mr. Whitefield himself: nay, abundantly more so, seeing he was far better qualified for that important work:—he had a more striking person, equal good-breeding, an equally winning address, together with a richer flow of fancy, a stronger understanding, a far greater treasure of learning, both in languages, philosophy, philology, and divinity, and above all (which I can speak with fuller assurance, because I had a thorough knowledge both of one and the other), a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

And yet let not any one imagine that I depreciate Mr. Whitefield, or undervalue the grace of God, and the extraordinary gifts which his great Master vouchsafed unto him. I believe he was highly favoured of God; yea, that he was one of the most eminent ministers that has appeared in England, or perhaps in the world, during the present century. Yet I must own, I have known many fully equal to Mr. Whitefield, both in holy tempers, and holiness of conversation; but one equal herein to Mr. Fletcher, I have not known, no not in a life of fourscore years.

However, having chosen, at least for the present,

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this narrow field of action, he was more and more abundant in his ministerial labours, both in public and private, not contenting himself with preaching, but visiting his flock in every corner of his parish. And this work he attended to, early and late, whether the weather was fair or foul, regarding neither heat nor cold, rain nor snow, whether he was on horseback or on foot. But this farther weakened his constitution, which was still more effectually done by his intense and uninterrupted studies, in which be frequently continued without scarce any intermission, fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen hours a day. But still he did not allow himself such food, as was necessary to sustain nature. He seldom took any regular meals, except he had company: otherwise twice or thrice in four and twenty hours, he ate some bread and cheese, or fruit. Instead of this, he sometimes took a draught of milk, and then wrote on again. When one reproved him for not affording himself a sufficiency of necessary food, he replied, "Not allow myself food! Why our food seldom costs my housekeeper and me together, less than two shillings a week."

On the tenth of May, 1774, (says Mr. Vaughan, to whom we are indebted for several of the preceding anecdotes) he wrote to me thus: 'My brother has sent me the rent of a little place I have abroad, eighty pounds, which I was to receive from Mr. Chauvet and Company, in London; but instead of sending the draught for the money, I have

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sent it back to Switzerland, with orders to distribute it among the poor. As money is rather higher there than here, that mite will go farther abroad than it would in my parish.'

To show in how great a degree he was disengaged from

> "Wealth, honour, pleasure, or what else
> This short-enduring world could give,"

Mr. Vaughan gives us another little memoir, which fell within his own knowledge: "After he had published two or three small political pieces, in reference to our contest with the Americans, I carried one of them (says he in a letter to me) to the Earl of D. His lordship carried it to the Lord Chancellor, and the Lord Chancellor handed it to the King. One was immediately commissioned to ask Mr. Fletcher whether any preferment in the church would be acceptable; or whether he (the Chancellor) could do him any service; he answered, 'I want nothing but more grace.'

"In 1776, he deposited with me a bill of one hundred and five pounds, being, as I understood, the yearly produce of his estate in Switzerland. This was his fund for charitable uses; but it lasted only a few months, before he drew upon me for the balance, which was twenty-four pounds, to complete the preaching-house in Madeley-wood."

In the same year his health being more than ever impaired by a violent cough, accompanied with spitting of blood, (of which I had had large experience

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myself). Having frequently seen the surprising effects of constant exercise, together with change of air, I told him nothing was so likely to restore his health as a long journey. I therefore proposed his taking a journey of some months with me, through various parts of England and Scotland, telling him, "When you are tired, or like it best, you may come into my carriage; but remember, that riding on horseback is the best of all exercises for *you*, so far as your strength will permit." He looked upon this as a call from providence, and very willingly accepted of the proposal. We set out (as I am accustomed to do) early in the spring, and travelled by moderate journies, suited to his strength, which gradually increased, eleven or twelve hundred miles. When we returned to London, in the latter end of the year, he was considerably better; and I verily believe, if he had travelled with me, partly in the chaise, and partly on horseback, only a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health,—but this those about him would not permit; so being detained in London by his kind, but injudicious friends, while I pursued my journies, his spitting of blood, with all the other symptoms, returned, and rapidly increased, till the physicians pronounced him to be far advanced in a true, pulmonary consumption.

It being judged quite improper for him to remain in London, on December 16, 1776, he retired to the house of a friend, Mr. Charles Greenwood, (now

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with God) to Stoke-Newington. Here he had the advice of the most eminent physicians that London could afford. He was also in a good air, and had every convenience and every help which art could bestow. One of the family, of whom I inquired concerning this part of his life, gave me the following information:

"Agreeably to your desire, I endeavour to recollect some particulars of Mr. Fletcher, during his abode at Newington.

"When he first came, he was, by Dr. Fothergill's advice, under the strictest observance of two things —rest and silence. These, together with a milk diet, were supposed to be the only probable means of his recovery. In consequence of these directions, he spoke exceedingly little. If ever he spoke more than usual, he did not fail to increase his spitting of blood, of which indeed, he was seldom quite clear, although it was not violent. Therefore a great part of his time was spent in being read to. But it was not possible to restrain him altogether from speaking. The fire which continually burned in his heart, many waters could not quench—it often burst out unawares, and then how did we wonder (like those who formerly heard his Lord) *at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth!* He could not have sustained life, without sometimes giving vent to his heart. No penance could have appeared so severe a cross to him, as to be debarred from speaking of, or to God. His na-

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tural vivacity, with his intense love of Jesus, continually impelled him to speak. But, on being reminded of his rule, with a cheerful smile, he was all submission; consenting by signs only, to stir up those about him to pray and praise!

"Whoever has read Mr. Fletcher's last Check to Antinomianism, and has had the privilege of observing his spirit and conduct, will not scruple to say, that he was a living comment on his own account of Christian perfection. It is an alarming word which our Lord speaks to the angel of the *Church of Sardis*, '*I have not found thy works perfect before God.*' But as far as man is able to judge from the whole tenor of his behaviour, he did possess perfect humility, perfect resignation, and perfect love. Suitable to this was the testimony concerning him, which was given at Lady Huntingdon's chapel, at Bristol, even by Mr. V., a gentleman strongly attached to those opinions, which Mr. Fletcher thought it his duty to oppose. 'I have enjoyed the privilege of being several weeks under the same roof with dear Mr. Fletcher; and during that time, I have been greatly edified by his perfect resignation to the will of God, and by being a witness to his exemplary conduct and uncommon grace.'

"When he was able to converse, his favourite subject was, '*The promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Ghost,*' including that rich, peculiar blessing, of union with the Father and the Son, men-

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tioned in that prayer of our Lord, which is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John. Many were the sparks of living fire, which occasionally darted forth on this beloved theme. 'We must not be content,' said he, 'to be only cleansed from sin—we must be filled with the Spirit.' One asking him, what was to be experienced in the full accomplishment of the promise; 'O!' said he, 'what shall I say?—All the sweetness of the drawings of the Father; all the love of the Son; all the rich effusions of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, more than ever can be expressed, are comprehended here! To attain it, the Spirit maketh intercession in the soul, like a God wrestling with a God!'

"It was in these favoured moments of converse, that we found, in a particular manner, the reward which is annexed to the *receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet.* And in some of these, he occasionally mentioned several circumstances, which (as none knew them but himself) would otherwise have been buried in everlasting oblivion.

"One of those remarkable passages was, 'In the beginning,' said he, 'of my spiritual course, I heard the voice of God, in an articulate, but inexpressibly awful sound, go through my soul in those words, *If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself.*' He mentioned another peculiar manifestation of a later date, in which, said he, 'I was favoured like Moses, with a supernatural discovery of the glory

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of God, in an ineffable converse with him, face to face; so that whether I was then in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell.'

"At another time he said, 'About the time of my entering into the ministry, I one evening wandered into a wood, musing on the importance of the office I was going to undertake. I then began to pour out my soul in prayer; when such a feeling sense of the justice of God fell upon me, and such a sense of his displeasure at sin, as absorbed all my powers, and filled my soul with the agony of prayer for poor lost sinners. I continued therein till the dawn of day, and I considered this as designed of God—to impress upon me more deeply the meaning of those solemn words, *Therefore knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.*'

"The blessed state of his soul continually manifested itself by its overflowing good-will to all that came in his way. And yet his spirit was so deeply impressed with these words, *Not as though I had already attained*, that the vehemence of his desire for a fuller manifestation of God, seemed sometimes to border upon unhappiness. But his ardent soul only felt the full impression of those words of the Apostle, '*Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before: I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*'

"One end of his retiring to Newington was, that he might hide himself from company, but this de-

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sign was in nowise answered, for company came from every side. He was continually visited by high and low, and by persons of various demoninations: one of whom being asked, when he went away, what he thought of Mr. Fletcher, said, 'I went to see a man that had one foot in the grave: but I found a man that had one foot in heaven.' Among them that now visited him were several of his beloved and honoured opponents, to whom he confirmed his love (however roughly they had treated him), by the most respectful and affectionate behaviour. But he did not give up any part of the truth, for which he had publicly contended, although some (from whom one would have expected better things) did not scruple to affirm the contrary. Those, of his particular friends, who visited him here, will not easily forget how he exhausted his whole soul in effusions of thankfulness—Mrs. Cartwright and Cavendish in particular, with his faithful and affectionate friend, Mr. Ireland, will remember their interviews with him. And those of the family were almost oppressed by the outpourings of his love and gratitude, whenever they showed their love and care in the most inconsiderable instance: yea, so thankful in proportion, would he be to even the meanest servant.

"It was not without some difficulty that Mr. Ireland, at length, prevailed upon him to sit for his picture. While the limner was drawing the outlines of it, he was exhorting both him and all that

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were in the room, not only to get the outlines drawn but the colourings also of the image of Jesus on their hearts. He had a very remarkable facility in making allusions of this kind ; in raising spiritual observations from every accidental circumstance ; in turning men's employments, pleasures, and pains, into means of edification ;—this he did, in order to engage the attention of the thoughtless, the more deeply to fix the attention of the thoughtful, and to prevent the trifling away of time in unprofitable conversation ; and such little incidents as used to pass away unnoticed, by almost any other person, acquired, from Mr. Fletcher's fine imagination, a kind of grace and dignity. To give an instance :—being ordered to be let blood, while his blood was running into the cup, he took occasion to expatiate on the precious blood-shedding of the Lamb of God ;* and even when he did not speak at all, the seraphic spirit which beamed from his languid face, during those months of pain and weakness, was

'A lecture silent, yet of sov'reign use.'

"One of those who visited him at Newington, was Mr. William Perronet, a pious, sensible, and amiable young man, who was snatched hence in the bloom of youth. He often said, the first sight of Mr. Fletcher fixt an impression upon his mind,

* But it is necessary to be observed, that this facility of raising useful observations from the most trifling incidents was one of those peculiarities in him which cannot be proposed to our imitation. In him it partly resulted from nature, and was partly a supernatural gift; but what was becoming and graceful in Mr. Fletcher, would be disgustful almost in any other.

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which never wore off, till it issued in a real conversion to God; ever accompanied with a most affectionate regard for the instrument of that happy change.

Soon after he left Newington, he wrote the following letter:

"May 28, 1777.

"To my very dear friends and benefactors, Charles and Mary Greenwood.

"My prayer shall always be, that the merciful may find mercy, and the great kindness I have found under your quiet roof, may be showed you every where under the canopy of heaven. I think, with grateful joy, on the days of calm retreat I have been blest with at Newington, and lament my not having improved better the precious opportunity of sitting, Mary like, at the feet of my Great Physician. May he requite your kind care of a dying worm, by abundantly caring for you and yours, and making all your bed in your sickness; May you enjoy full health! May you hunger and thirst after righteousness, and be abundantly filled therewith! May you sweetly rest in Christ! May his protection be as a wall of fire round about you and yours! May his rod and staff comfort you, under all the troubles of life—the decays of the body—the assaults of the enemy, and the pangs of death! May you stand in the clefts of the rock of ages, and be safely sheltered there, when all the storms of justice blow around! And may you al-

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ways have such spiritual and temporal helps, friends, and comforts, as I have found in your pleasing retreat. You have received a poor Lazarus (though his sores were not visible); you have had compassion like the good Samaritan; you have admitted me into the enjoyment of your best things! and now what can I say? What, but thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift, and thanks to my dear friends for all their favours. They will, I trust, be found faithfully recorded in my breast, when the Great Rewarder of them that diligently seek him, will render to every man according to his works. And a raised Lazarus shall then appear in the gate, to testify of the love of Charles and Mary Greenwood, and their godly sister;

"I was a little better; but I now spit blood, more than I had done for weeks before. Glory be to God for every Providence! His will be done in me, by health or sickness, life or death. All from Him is, and, I trust will be welcome to

Your obliged Pensioner,

JOHN FLETCHER."

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CHAPTER VI.

From his leaving Newington, till his return from Switzerland to Madeley.

He continued with Mr. Greenwood, at Newington, upwards of fifteen months. The physicians then advised him to make a trial of the hot-well water, near Bristol. "I was desired, by Mr. and Mrs. Ireland (who took him down in April 1777)," says Miss Thornton, "to bear them company thither, which I willingly did. Indeed I looked upon it as a call from God; nor could I desire a greater honour than to share in the employment of angels, in ministering to a distinguished heir of salvation. At Brislington, near Bristol, he continued in the same holy, earnest course, as at Newington. Every day he drank the hot-well water, and it agreed with him well; so that he appeared to gather a little strength, though not so swiftly as was expected; and all the strength which he received, he laid out in labours of love, for the benefit of all those, rich or poor, whom providence cast in his way.

"Whenever he was in company, it was his general method, so far as his strength would admit, to pray particularly for every person present. And from his habitual prayer, resulted that life and energy in his words, which every one that was blest with his society, felt more or less. Now and then

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likewise he adventured to pray in the family—but he was not wary enough in this. He more than once so much exerted himself, that he was brought very low. As soon as he was well enough to write, he was intent upon finishing two treatises for the press. The plan of *Reconciliation*, in particular, lay very near his heart. He longed to conclude it before he died, which he wished to do, breathing peace to Jerusalem, and pointing out to the children of God, the most probable means of effecting it—of uniting together in the bonds of peace and love, all the true ministers and followers of Jesus."

From Bristol he wrote to a friend thus: "I thank God I am not afraid of any evil tidings: my heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord, and desiring him to do with me just what pleases him. With respect to my body, my physician hopes I shall do well—and so I hope and believe too—for health or sickness, life or death, is best when the Lord sends it.

"I am in hopes of seeing you soon, though my friends talk of detaining me, to make a further trial of the waters. I am forbid preaching; but blessed be God, I am not forbid by my heavenly physician, to pray, believe, and love. This is a sweet work, which heals, strengthens, and delights; let us do it, till we have recovered our spiritual strength; and then, whether we shall be seen on earth or not, it will be all alike.

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"O, be hearty in the cause of religion—be either hot or cold. It is a fearful thing to be lukewarm, and thereby fall into the hands of the living God! Be humbly zealous for your own salvation and for God's glory; and forget not to care for each other's salvation. The case of wicked Cain is very common: the practice of many says, with that wretch, '*Am I my brother's keeper?*' O, pray God to keep you by his mighty power through faith unto salvation. Keep yourselves in the love of God, and keep one another, by example, reproof, exhortation, encouragement, social prayer, and a faithful use of all the means of grace. Use yourselves to bow at Christ's feet as your prophet. Go to him continually for the holy anointing of his spirit, who will be a teacher always near, always with you, and in you. If you have that inward instructor, you will suffer no material loss, though your outward teachers should be removed.

"While you have the light of God's word, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of the light, fitted for the kingdom of eternal light! Where I charge you prepare to meet with joy

Your affectionate, though unworthy
Brother and Minister,
JOHN FLETCHER."

I subjoin part of a letter wrote, some time before, in the same spirit, to his parishioners, at Madeley.

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"December 28, 1776.

"My dear parishioners,

"The weakness of my body confining me from you, I humbly submit to the Divine dispensation: and I ease the trouble of my absence from you, by being present with you in spirit, and by reflecting on the pleasure I have felt, in years past, in singing with you, '*Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.*' This truth let us receive with all readiness, and we shall meet in Christ, the centre of lasting union; and our hearts shall be full of the song of angels, '*Glory be unto God in the highest! On earth peace! Good-will toward men!*' In order to this, may the eyes of your understanding be more and more opened to see the need of a Redeemer, and to behold the suitableness, freeness, and fulness of the redemption, wrought out by the Son of God! This wish glows in my soul so ardently that it brings me down upon my knees, while I write. And in that posture, I entreat you all to consider and improve the day of your visitation; and to prepare, in good earnest, to meet with joy your God, and your unworthy pastor in another world! Weak as I was when I left you, I hear that many, who were then healthy and strong, have got the start of me; and that some have been hurried into eternity, without a moment's warning. May this awful event strike a deeper consideration into all our souls! May the sound of their bodies, dashed in pieces at the bottom of the pit, rouse us to a speedy

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conversion, that we may never, through carelessness or delay, fall into the bottomless pit! Tottering as I stand on the brink of the grave, some of you also may drop into it before me. Let us all then prepare for our approaching change, and never rest till we are assured it will be a happy one! Let the long-suffering of God towards us, who survive the hundreds that I have buried, lead us all to repentance! Embrace Jesus Christ, who wept for you in the manger, agonized for you in the garden, bled for you on the cross, and now pleads for you on his mediatorial throne! Meet me not at the great day in your sins and in your blood! Meet me in the robe of Christ's merits and in *the white linen* (the purity of heart and life), *which is the righteousness of the saints!* Let all wickedness be gone for ever with the old year! and with the new year begin a new life; a life of renewed devotion to God, and increasing love to our neighbour!

"Though I hope to see much more of the goodness of God in the land of the living, than I do see, yet, blessed be the divine mercy, I see enough to keep my mind at all times unruffled, and to make me calmly willing to resign my soul into the hands of my faithful Creator. I desire your public thanks for all the favours which he continually showeth me. May our thankfulness crown the new year, as the Lord's patience and goodness have renewed our life. Permit me to beseech an interest in your

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prayers also. Ask that I may be willing to receive all that God is willing to bestow. Ask that I may meekly suffer and zealously do all the will of God in my present circumstances; and that, living or dying, I may say, 'To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' If God calls me soon, I beg he may in his good providence, appoint a more faithful shepherd over you. You need not fear but he will. For these many months you have had no famine of the word—and what God hath done for months, he can do for years; yea, all the years of your life. Only pray. Ask and you shall have. Meet me at the throne of grace, and you shall meet at the throne of glory

Your affectionate, obliged,
Unworthy Minister,
J F."

To a friend, meantime, he wrote thus: "With respect to my soul, I calmly wait in unshaken resignation, for the full salvation of God; ready to trust him, to venture on his faithful love, and on the sure mercies of David, either at midnight, noon-day, or cock-crowing. For my time is in his hand; and his time is best, and shall be my time. Death has lost his sting, and, I thank God, I know not what hurry of spirits is, or unbelieving fears, under the most trying circumstances. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift."

He now spent part of his time at Bristol, but the greatest part at Brislington. In one place or the

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other, as well as at Newington, he was visited by many respectable persons. Many of these were Calvinists—several of whom bore witness to his deep piety and exalted spirit. But a dissenting minister, after pressing him hard, with regard to some of his opinions, told him, with great warmth, "Mr. Fletcher, you had better have been gasping for life with an asthma, or have had all your limbs unstrung by a palsy, than to have wrote those Checks." Mr. Fletcher replied, "Sir, I then wanted more love, and I do so still:" and in his highest fervours of divine love, he always acknowledged his want of more.

Here also he missed no opportunity of instructing servants and children, suiting his discourse, in a manner peculiar to himself, to their capacity or their business. And what would have appeared low in another, did not appear so when spoken by him. Thus he advised the cook, to stir up the fire of divine love in his heart, that it might burn up all the rubbish therein, and raise a flame of holy affection: to which, with the greatest cordiality, he would subjoin a short prayer. Thus to the housemaid, he said, "I entreat you to sweep every corner of your heart, that it may be fit to receive your heavenly guest." To a poor man who came there in a deep consumption, but little concerned for his soul, he said, in a very solemn manner (laying one hand on his own breast, and the other on the poor man's), "God has fixt a loud knocker at your breast

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and mine; because we did not regard, as we ought to have done, the gentle knocks and calls of his Holy Spirit, his word, and his providences; he has taken fast hold here, and we cannot get out of his hand. O, let this knocker awaken you, who are just dropping into eternal sleep!"

When one or another, occasionally mentioned any unkind thing, which had been said of him, or his writings, if the person who had said it was named, he would stop the speaker immediately, and offer up the most fervent prayer for the person of whom he spoke. He did not willingly suffer any one to say any thing against his opponents; and he made all the allowances for them, which, on a change of circumstances, he would have wished them to make for him.

He continued at Brislington till the 1st of December, 1777. All other means having now been fairly tried, with very little effect, most of the symptoms being nearly the same as they were several months ago, it was determined, by the most skilful physicians, that nothing could save his life but a sea voyage. When this was fixed, Mr. Ireland (a friend in need!) carried him back to Newington. While he was here, preparing for his voyage, he wrote as follows, to one of his flock at Madeley:

"I heartily thank you for your kind letter. May the God of all grace and love, our common Father and our all, bless you all with all spiritual blessings,

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and with such temporal favours as will best serve the end of your growing in grace.

"My desire is, if I should be spared to minister to you again, to do it with more humility, diligence love, and zeal. But as matters are, you must take the will for the deed. And let us all praise God for all that is past, and trust him for all that is to come! The Lord enable you all to cleave to Christ, and in him to abide in one mind, *striving together for the hope of the gospel*, the fulness of the Spirit. Of this we have often discoursed together; but we have not pressed into it with sufficient ardour and violence. God give us the humble and violent faith, which inherits the promises, that we may always triumph in Christ in life and in death! I beg you would help me to thank the Author of all good for every blessing of this life; but above all, for the lively hope of the next, and for Christ, our common hope, peace, joy, wisdom, righteousness, and salvation! In him I meet and embrace you all! God bless you, and crown you with loving-kindness and tender mercies! I live if you stand. Do not let me want the reviving cordial of hearing that you stand together firm in the faith, deep in humility, and rejoicing in loving hope of the glory to come! Bless God much for the gift of his only begotten Son! Be much in private prayer. Do not forget the assembling yourselves together in little companies, as well as in public. Walk hum-

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bly as in the sight of death and eternity; and pray still for

Your unworthy servant,

J. F.

"Let none of our little companies want. If any do, you are welcome to my house. Take any part of the furniture there, and make use of it for their relief. And this shall be your full title for so doing.

Witness my hand,

JOHN FLETCHER."

In the beginning of December, he set out with Mr. Ireland and his family, besides some other company. A little account of the former part of his journey, is given by Mr. Ireland, in a letter to a friend:

"We left Calais, Dec. 12. The north wind was very high, and penetrated us even in the chaise. We put up at Bretzul, and the next day got to Abbeville; whence we were forced, by the miserable accommodations we met with, to set out, though it was Sunday. Mr. Fletcher and I used to lead the way; but now the other chaises got before us. Nine miles from Abberville our axletree gave way, through the hard frost, and we were both left to the piercing cold, on the side of a hill without any shelter. After waiting an hour and a half, we sent the axletree and wheels back, to be repaired; and leaving the body of the chaise under a guard, procured another to carry us to the next town. On the

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15th, our chaise arrived in good repair. Travelling steadily forward, (though the country was all covered with snow) on the 27th we reached Dijon. During the whole journey Mr. Fletcher showed visible marks of a recovery. He bore both the fatigue and piercing cold as well as the best of us. On the 31st we put up at Lyons, and solemnly closed the year, bowing our knees before the throne, which indeed, we did not fail to do, all together every day. January 4, 1778, we left Lyons, and came on the ninth to Aix. Here we rest, the weather being exceeding fine and warm. Mr. Fletcher walks out daily. He is now able to read, and to pray with us every morning and evening. He has no remains of his cough, or of the weakness in his breast. His natural colour is restored, and the sallowness quite gone. His appetite is good, and he takes a little wine."

In another letter Mr. Ireland writes thus: "Soon after our arrival here, I rode out most days with my dear and valuable friend. He now and then complained of the uneasiness of the horse, and there was some remains of soreness in his breast, but this soon went off. The beginning of February was warm, which when he walked in the fields, relaxed him too much. But when the wind got north or east he was braced again. His appetite is good, his complexion as healthy as it was eleven years ago. As his strength increases, he increases the length of his rides. Last Tuesday he

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set out on a journey of a hundred and twelve miles. The first day he travelled forty miles without feeling any fatigue. The third day he travelled fifty-five. He bore his journey as well as I did; and was as well and as active at the end of it, as at the beginning. During the day, he cried out, 'Help me to praise the Lord for his goodness; I never expected to see this day.' He now accepted a pressing invitation to preach to the Protestants here. He did so, on Sunday morning, on these words, '*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.*' For some days before, he was afraid he had done wrong, in accepting the invitation. But O, how shall I be able to express the power and liberty which the Lord gave him! Both the French and English were greatly affected—the word went to the heart both of saints and sinners. If the Lord continues his strength and voice (which is now as good as ever it was) he has an earnest invitation to preach where we are going—near Montpelier. You would be astonished at the entreaties of pastors as well as people. He has received a letter from a minister in the Levine mountains, who intends to come to Montpelier, sixty miles, to press him to go and preach to his flock. Soon after this, his brother came to fetch him to Switzerland. He purposes to spend the next summer in his own country, and the following winter in these parts, or in some part of the south of France.

"His brother conducted him from Montpelier to

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Nyon, the place of his nativity. Here he lived in that which was his father's house, in the midst of his affectionate relations, who took care that he should neither want the best advice, perhaps equal to any in Europe, nor any thing that could possibly contribute to the full recovery of his health."

About this time a letter was wrote to that venerable old man, Mr. Perronet, vicar of Shoreham, informing him, that there was a valuable estate at his native place, which properly belonged to him, and which might easily be recovered, if he sent one of his sons to claim it. All his friends whom he consulted on the occasion, judged this information was not to be slighted; and his youngest son, Mr. William Perronet, was willing to undertake the journey; but before he set out, he wrote to Mr. Fletcher, desiring his advice. Part of his answer was as follows:

"Nyon, June 2, 1778.

"While I write to you to make your title clear to a precarious estate on earth; permit me to remind you of the heavenly inheritance entailed upon believers. The will (the New Testament) by which we can recover it is proved: the court is equitable: the Judge loving and gracious. To enter on the possession of part of the estate here, and of the whole hereafter, we need only to *believe*, and *prove evangelically*, that we are believers. Let us set about it *now* with earnestness, with perseverance, and with full assurance, that through grace, we shall

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carry our point. Alas! what are estates or crowns, to grace and glory! The Lord grant we may all choose the better part!

"Since I wrote last, in order to shorten my journey, I ventured to cross the mountains, which separate France from this country; but on the third day, I found an unexpected trial: a hill, which we were to ascend by a winding road, but so steep, that the horses were hardly able to draw the empty chaise: this obliged me to walk in the steepest places, for several hours together; the sun was hot; I perspired violently, and the next day I spat blood again; but having kept to asses' milk ever since, I am, blessed be God, much better.

"This country is delightful; I invite you to come and see it, and share a delightful apartment. I design to try this fine air some months longer; we have a fine shady wood, near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all the day, and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds; but this, though sweet, does not come up to the singing of my dear friends in England,—there I meet them in spirit several hours in the day. God bless my dear friends."

About the same time he wrote to Dr. Turner as follows:

"Should I gather strength, I should, under God, acknowledge *you*, dear Sir, as the instrument of that blessing, as you were above twenty years ago. Ten thousand thanks I render to you, Sir, and to Mr. Perronet, for your kind and generous care and

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attendance. May God reward you both, by bestowing upon you all the blessings which can make life happy, death comfortable, and eternity delightful and glorious! May the richest cordials of divine love, and the balm of Gilead, a Saviour's precious blood, revive your souls and comfort your hearts! and in your every want and extremity, may you both find such tender helpers and comforters, as have been found in you by, dear Sir,

Your most obliged, though most unworthy,
Servant and Patient,
JOHN FLETCHER,"

In the latter end of the year, Mr. William Perronet set out for Switzerland. In a letter he wrote from thence to Mr. Greenwood, he gives a little farther account of Mr. Fletcher. And this letter, I the rather insert, as I believe it is all that remains of that amiable young man, who never more saw his native land, being called hence, while he was on his journey to England.

There is something in the beginning of his letter, which is a little humorous; but this the candid reader will easily excuse. It runs thus:

"Nyon, Jan. 18, 1779.

"Dear Sir,

"As you desire of me to send you some account of my journey, now I am a little settled, I will do it in the best manner I am able.

"I set out from London, on Tuesday, November the seventeenth; we arrived at Dover about three

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on Wednesday morning; embarked on Thursday, and arrived at Calais in about three hours.

"Though it was in war time, yet we did not meet with the least incivility, either here or in any part of France: but the badness of the inns makes the travelling through this country disagreeable; the rooms in general are so dirty, as to be fitter for swine than men: each room both above and below stairs, is provided with two, three, or four beds, and they are so high as to require steps to go up to them; for there is on each bed, first, a monstrous canvass bag, stuffed with a huge quantity of straw: over this a feather bed, and on this as many mattresses as the hosts can furnish. But the worst is, the sheets are not damp, but rather down-right wet; yet the good woman would constantly scold us, if we attempted to dry them even at our own fire: insisting upon it that it was impossible they should be damp at all.

"At table every one is furnished with a spoon and a fork, but with no knives; and in general, they are not needful, for both flesh and vegetables are so stewed down, as to be properly termed spoon-meat. However, at the meanest inn, every one is provided with a clean napkin; and both after dinner and after supper, there is a fine dessert of fruit.

"We travelled early and late: yet having but one set of horses, we were a whole week in getting to Paris. In Paris all is gaiety and finery; but

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without the least idea of neatness. The scarcity of water is one excuse for the general want of cleanliness both in their persons and houses.

"On Tuesday, Dec. 8, we dined at Portallier, the prettiest town in all France, the reason of which is, being burnt down some years ago, it was rebuilt by the late king. The next morning we entered Switzerland, stepping over a brook, which divides Switzerland from France. On the French side of the brook is a cross: on the other a pillar with the arms of Switzerland. In the evening we arrived at Lausanne, a famous old town; here I remained the next day, and on Friday the eleventh, went on to Nyon, where I had the pleasure of finding our dear friend in pretty good health and spirits. Mr. Fletcher's house is a fine large building, agreeably situated; it is in the form of a castle, and is supposed to have been built five hundred years ago.

"In passing through France, how bitterly did I regret the want of the Sunday service! And it was not much better with me when I came into Switzerland; for I understood so little of their language, that I could not profit much by the public service. Indeed, this loss is in some measure made up by the company and conversation of Mr. Fletcher: who, however engaged he is the greater part of the day, is generally so kind as to spend a little time with me in the evening, in prayer and conversation.

"His chief delight seems to be in the meeting of

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his little society of children; and as he is exceeding fond of them, they appear to be altogether as fond of him. He seldom either walks abroad or rides out, but some of them follow him, singing the hymns they have learned, and conversing with him by the way. But you must not suppose that he is permitted to enjoy this happiness unmolested: not only the drunkards make songs upon him and his little companions, but many of the clergy loudly complain of such irregular proceedings. However, he is upon good terms with the three ministers of the place; all of whom are not only serious men, but desirous of promoting true religion.

"He is certainly stronger, and in better health, than he was when he left England; but as soon as ever he ventures to preach, his spitting of blood returns. Whenever this happens, his strength and spirits decay surprisingly, which he cannot in any wise recover, but by lying by for some days.

"Whether I succeed in my temporal business or not, I shall ever remember with pleasure and thankfulness the opportunities I have been blest with of spending so much time in company with our inestimable friend; who, wherever he goes, preaches the gospel, both by his words and example; nay, by his very looks, not only to his friends, but to all he meets with. So that on the top of the frozen Alps, and in the dreary vale of Chateau d'Oex, some good seed has been sown.

"When my business constrained me to go to

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Chateau d'Oex, Mr. Fletcher bore me company; and here also he was visited by some of the principal inhabitants of the town; who stood round him in deep attention for almost an hour, while be both exhorted and prayed.

I am, dear Sir,
Your very sincere Friend and servant,
WILLIAM PERRONET."

Mr. Fletcher adds, upon the same paper, "Thanks to our kind Preserver, I am yet in the land of faith and hope, and want to find and make it a land of happiness and love. The Lord Jesus is alone sufficient for this; and till the great out-pouring of his love is come, we ought faithfully to stir up the gift of God which is in ourselves and others, and to supply by the depth of our humility, and the ardour of our expectation, what is yet wanting to our experience. Well: God is good: Jesus is faithful: the Spirit is truth and love. Come, Lord! And we shall experience the power of that God, who turns death to life, darkness to light, weakness to strength, and *calleth the things that are not as though they were.*"

Mr. Perronet, in another letter to Mr. Greenwood, dated May 22, writes thus:

"My dear friend is much better in health now than he was in the winter. He preached last Sunday se'nnight in the church. He spoke with a strong, clear voice, for above three quarters of an hour: and did not find himself hurt by it. But

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when he rode out in the afternoon, his horse dropped down, as if he had been shot, and cut both his knees, as well as his head—yet Mr. Fletcher was no way hurt.

"On Good-Friday, there being no service here, Mr. Fletcher and I crossed the lake into Savoy, in order to hear a celebrated Capuchin, who was to preach that day. He made a very good discourse; and afterwards, he and his brethren invited us to dine with them. This we declined, but after dinner, paid our respects to them; and we spent two or three agreeable hours in serious and friendly conversation."

About this time Mr. Fletcher wrote to a friend thus:

"Let us bear with patience the decays of nature: let us see without fear the approach of death. We must put off this sickly, corruptible body, in order to put on the immortal and glorious garment.

"I have some hopes that my poor sister will yet be my sister in Christ. Her self-righteousness, I trust, breaks as fast as her body. I am come hither to see death make havoc among my friends. I wear mourning for my father's brother, and for my brother's son. The same mourning will serve me for my dying sister, if I do not go before her. She lies on the same bed where my father and mother died, and where she and I were born. How near is life to death!—but blessed be God! Christ, the resurrection, is nearer to the weak, dy-

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ing believer! Death works through the body, and the resurrection through the soul. And our soul is our real self."

I believe it was about the same time that a remarkable passage occurred, which was related to me some years ago. I may possibly have forgot some circumstances; but the substance of it was this:—Mr. Fletcher having heard of a minister in the country, as an eminently pious man, had a great desire to see him, and for that purpose, one morning, set out very early. When he had walked several miles, he saw a great crowd gathered together at the door of a house. He asked what was the matter; and was answered, "A poor woman and her child lie a dying." He went in, and found a woman who had not long been delivered, in appearance very near death. Little better was the case of the infant, which was convulsed from head to foot. The room was filled with people. He took occasion to show them, from that melancholy spectacle, the dreadful effects of sin; and afterwards, spoke largely of the miserable state we are all in, through the sin of our first parent. He then expatiated on the second Adam, and the blessings we may receive through him: adding, "He is able to raise the dead? He is able to save you from all sin, as well as save these two poor objects from death. Come, let us ask him to save both us and them." He found remarkable liberty in prayer. Presently the child's convulsions ceased, and the mother was

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easy, lively, and strong. The people were utterly amazed, and stood speechless, and almost senseless! While they were in this state, he silently withdrew. When they came to themselves, he was gone. Many of them asked, who it could be; and some said, "Certainly it was an angel."

When he had a little recovered his strength, he made a tour through Italy, and paid a visit to Rome. While he was here, as Mr. Ireland and he were one day going through one of the streets in a coach, they were informed the Pope was coming forward, and it would be required of them to come out of the coach, and kneel while he went by, as all the people did; if they did not, in all probability, the zealous mob would fall upon them, and knock them on the head. But this, whatever might be the consequence, they flatly refused to do—judging the paying such an honour to a man was neither better nor worse than idolatry. The coachman was exceedingly terrified, not knowing what to do. However, at length, he made a shift to turn aside into a narrow way. The Pope was in an open landau. He waved his hands, as if he had been swimming: and frequently repeated these words, "God bless you all!" Mr. Fletcher's spirit was greatly stirred, and he longed to bear a public testimony against anti-christ. And he would undoubtedly have done it had he been able to speak Italian. He could hardly refrain from doing it in Latin, till he considered that only the priests could have under-

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stood him. One, to whom he related this, saying, if he had done this, the multitude would have torn him to pieces; he answered, "I believe the Pope himself would have prevented it; for he was a man of sense and humanity."

While he was at Paris, he was desired to visit and pray with a sick woman. Information of this was quickly given to a magistrate, with abundance of aggravation. In consequence of this, an order was procured from the king himself for the apprehending of him. This might, not improbably have cost him his life, or at least, a long and expensive imprisonment. When the officer came to the door of the house where he lodged, Mr. Ireland stepped out and said, "Sir, have you a warrant for *me?*" He (supposing him to be Mr. Fletcher) answered, —you must come with me." Mr. Ireland went very quietly with him; but when they came before the magistrate, the accuser said, "This is not the man—I know nothing of this gentleman." Another messenger was then sent; but before he came to the house, Mr. Fletcher was too far off to be overtaken.

While he was at Nyon, he wrote (among many other letters), to good old Mr. Perronet, as follows:

"February 8, 1779.

"Honoured and dear father in Christ,

"I have had the pleasure of accompanying your son to your father's birth-place. It is a charming

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country for those who have a taste for highland prospects. But what is it to our Heavenly Father's hill of Sion? Thither may we all travel, summer and winter, and there may we all have a happy meeting, and an eternal inheritance."

September 7, Mr. William Perronet wrote a little farther account of him. "Mr. Fletcher," says he, "has preached here (at Nyon) in the church, and might have preached much oftener, if his health would have permitted; for his friendly and prudent behaviour has won upon all the three ministers, so that they are now on the best terms with him. But a new difficulty has lately arisen:—He has been summoned before the Seigneur Bailiff, who sharply reprehended him (noble Bailiff indeed! —worthy of his office!) for preaching against Sabbath-breaking, which, he said, implied a censure of the magistrates, as if they neglected their duty. He reprimanded him also for preaching against stage-plays, which he considered as a reflection on himself, as he had just then sent for a company of French comedians to Nyon. In consequence of this, he forbade his exercising the function of a minister in this country. A blessed instance of republican liberty! Who would not wish for the same in England? However, one of the ministers has ventured to give him a room in his own house. Here he preaches two or three times a week, to a few serious persons, and abundance of children. His lordship has not yet thought proper to interfere,

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although the thing is no secret. And not only the seriousness, but also the number of the congregation increases daily."

In the next year, 1780, Mr. Fletcher fully intended to return to England; but not long after, he wrote as follows to one of his parishioners, at Madeley:

"I have the more readily complied with the request of my friends, to stay here (at Nyon) a little longer, as it was so earnestly backed by the little society, which is gathered in this place. About three weeks ago, they got about me and besought me, on their knees, with many tears, to stay till they were a little stronger, and able to stand alone. Nor would they be persuaded to rise, till they had got me to comply. Happy would it be for us all, if we prayed so earnestly to Him, who can give substantial blessings!

"Two days ago I went to Geneva, and spoke to a carrier, to take me back to London—but his coach was full. Yesterday another came, and said he would take us at a fortnight's notice. The Lord is always ready to give us a lift to the kingdom of grace, through which we must pass to the kingdom of glory. The comfort of this journey is, that we may travel all together, though our bodies are far asunder. For Christ, the way, is every where, and faith is (like his word) one and the same in every age and place. So is holiness; for in all places we may love God with all our heart, and

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our neighbour as ourselves. I hope you and all your brethren travel thus; and that you journey like St. Paul, who travelled so hard, that he was *running a race*, for a prize, a crown of life."

In Spring, 1781, he set out for England. But Mr. Perronet was then exceeding ill, having all the symptoms of an approaching consumption. He could not therefore, keep pace with Mr. Fletcher; who being on his journey, wrote to him as follows:

Lyons, April 6, 1781.

"My dear Friend,

"We are both weak and both afflicted; but Jesus careth for us. He is every where. He has all power to deliver us; and, perhaps, by ways we little think of. It was of the Lord, that you did not come with me—you would have been sick, as I am. I am overdone with riding and preaching; indeed twice I preached in the fields. I carry home with me much weakness—the Lord's will be done. I know I am called to suffer and die. Let us believe and rejoice in the Lord Jesus."

He returned to England in Summer, in tolerable health, being quite recovered from his consumption. Calling at London, he preached at the new chapel, slept at Newington, and the next day, set out for Bristol. He stayed there only a short time, and then retired to Mr. Ireland's at Brislington; who, as soon as he was capable, willingly accompanied him to his beloved Madeley.

But he did not find such cause of rejoicing here,

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as he had fondly expected. This may be easily gathered from the letter he then wrote to his friend at Newington. It runs thus :

Madeley, June 12, 1781.

"My very dear Friend,

"I stayed longer at Brislington than I designed. Mr. Ireland was ill, and would nevertheless come hither with me ; so that I was obliged to stay till he was better ; and indeed it was well that I did not come without him ; for he has helped me to regulate my outward affairs, which were in great confusion. Mr. Greaves leaves me ; and I will either leave Madeley, or have an assistant able to stir among the people ; for I had much rather be gone than stay here, to see the dead bury their dead. Well, we shall soon remove out of all, and rest from our little cares and labours. You do not forget, I hope, that you have need of patience, as well as I, to inherit the promises, the best and greatest of which are not sealed, but to such as keep the word of Christ's patience, and such as persevere with him in his temptations. Hold on then, patient in faith and joyful in hope ! If I were by you, I would preach to your heart and my own, a lecture on this text, '*We are saved by hope*,' and by a faith which is never stronger than when it is contrary to all the feelngs of flesh and blood.

"Pray what news of the glory ? Does the glory of the Lord fill the temple, your house, your heart?

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A cloud is over my poor parish : but alas ! it is not the luminous cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night. Even the few remaining professors stared at me the other day, when I preached to them on these words, '*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost : for the promise is given unto you.*' Well, the promise is unto *us ;* if others despise it, still let us believe and hope,—nothing enlarges the heart, and awakens the soul, more than that believing, loving expectation. Let us wait together, until we are all endued with power from on high."

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CHAPTER VII.

Of his Marriage.

ALTHOUGH the great apostle has ranked *the forbidding to marry* among the *doctrines of devils*, and has expressly declared, "*Marriaye is honourable to all men, and the bed undefiled:*" yet a kind of prejudice hangs on the minds of many, even of those that love God, inclining them to disapprove of the marriage of persons eminent in religion. Yea, many are of opinion that it is not consistent with high degrees of holiness; and that when any who have deep experience in the things of God, marry, they are in some measure, fallen from grace. Hence, many were surprised, that so eminent a Christian as Mr. Fletcher, should take this step. And they could hardly help thinking, that he had lost some degree of his excellent piety, and that he was not so unreservedly devoted to God, as he had been some time before.

In order to satisfy every reasonable person, that he had not sustained any loss at all, that his entire self-devotion was in no wise impaired, either before, or at the time of his marriage, I believe the most convincing way will be to give as particular an account as possible, of what occurred at that time. The account is given by one that was an eye and ear witness of what she relates; and whoever

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seriously considers this account will easily perceive, that his soul was at that time all alive, and wholly devoted to God. And I cannot but recommend this whole transaction to the imitation of all Christians, who enter the holy state of matrimony.

As I think it highly expedient to premise some account of the person whom Mr. Fletcher chose as his companion for life, I am glad to find this done to my hand in the letter which I shall now subjoin:

"Rev. Sir,

"I think it my privilege, and have often found it a blessing, to comply with the request of my honoured father, which I now do also in great love to my valuable and much esteemed friends, Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher. I will therefore endeavour, with the assistance of my gracious Lord, to recollect and acquaint you with some particulars of the life and character of these truly devoted servants of God, with whose intimate acquaintance I have been favoured for near thirty years. But indeed, I feel my great insufficiency to relate what might be said, with the strictest truth, of these worthies.

"My acquaintance with Mrs. Fletcher began when she was about seventeen years of age. She had, from her early childhood, been strongly drawn to seek the crucified, and was now athirst for a clean heart, and longed to have a right spirit renewed within her. Nor did her desire to love God with all her heart lessen, but increase her love to

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her neighbour ; as I the most unworthy am well able to testify, to whom she has been a tried friend, even to the present hour.

"To give you a clear view of this, I need only transcribe part of a letter, which she wrote to me, May 23, 1757.

"My dearest friend,

"The Lord has been indeed merciful, above all we can ask or think. I found a greater blessing the last time I was with you than ever. I am more enabled to prayer, and to an earnest seeking after holiness. But what most stirs me up is, I seem to hear the Lord calling upon me, '*Depart ye, depart ye: go ye out thence: touch not the unclean thing: be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.*' For some time these words have been much in my mind. with both pleasure and profit. But within this day or two, the Lord has more clearly shown me the way wherein I ought to walk. He seems to call me out to more activeness ; so that I am ready to cry out, 'What wouldst thou have me to do?' Then I consider, 'Can I do any more for the souls or bodies of the poor about me?' But this does not seem to be the thing. What I am now led to wish for is, with both soul and body to serve those who are in Christ. And as soon as the Lord has prepared me for this work, and set me at liberty, my firm resolution is, by the grace of God, to be wholly given up to the Church. I plainly see I have no more to do with the world, than to

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allow myself the necessaries of life. And though it has pleased God that I have no need to work for my living, yet surely that is no reason my hand should be idle. I would be like those described, 1 Tim. v. 10, *To bring up children*, to *lodge strangers*, to be ready to do the meanest offices for the saints: to *relieve the afflicted, to visit the fatherless and widow, and diligently to follow every good work.* O, pray for me, that the Lord may shorten his work in me, and quickly make an end of sin! O, that he would say to my soul, '*Thou art fair, my love! There is no spot in thee!*' O, when shall I be wholly given up, both body and soul, to him who gave himself for me."

"I admired the spirit of this letter; but little expected to see these good desires brought so fully into practice, as they were in a few years after. And this may suffice as a clear proof, that God fulfils the desires of them that fear him; yea, and shows unto them the path wherein he would have you to walk. That her light, given before, was not delusive, is plain; as it is well known how many years she has *brought up children, lodged strangers*, relieved the afflicted, and *diligently followed every good work.*

"With regard to the dear saint, that is now swallowed up in his beloved employment—praise and adoration, it is eight or nine and twenty years since I was first favoured with his heavenly conversation, in company with Mr. Walsh and a few

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other friends, most of whom are now in the world of spirits. At these seasons how frequently did we feel

'The o'erwhelming power of saving grace.'

How frequently were we silenced thereby, while tears of love our eyes overflowed! It sweetly affects my soul, while I recollect the humility, fervour of spirit, and strength of faith, with which dear Mr. Fletcher so often poured out his soul before the Great Three One, at whose feet we have lain in holy shame and divine silence, till it seemed earth was turned to heaven! With what delight does my soul recall those precious moments! Yet a little while, and we shall all magnify his name together.

"This heavenly-minded servant of the Lord resembled him likewise in his love to precious souls. I heard him preach his first sermon at West-street chapel. I think his text was, '*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*' His spirit appeared in his whole attitude and action, though he could not well find words in the English language to express himself; but he supplied that defect, by offering up prayers, tears, and sighs abundantly. Nearly about this time he saw Miss Bosanquet, and began his acquaintance with her. But, although they had a particular esteem for each other, yet they had no correspondence for above twenty years. It was not till the yearly conference drew near, in July, 1781, that he paid her a visit at her

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own house, near Leeds. They had much conversation together, and contracted an intimate acquaintance. After a few days, Miss Bosanquet asked Mr. Wesley's advice, concerning Mr. Fletcher's proposal, who approved it entirely, being persuaded it would be much to the glory of God. He spent much of his time at Cross-Hall, till the following January. His general conversation was praising God, and speaking of the love of our dear Redeemer. He took opportunities, likewise, of speaking to every one in the family, concerning the state of their souls, and giving them from time to time, such directions as were suitable thereto. At other times, he met us all together, and gave us proper exhortations and directions. Our daily meals were as a sacrament—when he drank to any one it was,—'Heavenly health,' or, 'The cup of salvation.' At, or after the meal, he generally begun, or called us to begin that verse,

'Still, O my soul, prolong
The never-ceasing song!
Christ my theme, my hope, my joy,
His be all my happy days!
Praise my every hour employ,
Every breath be spent in praise!'

After dinner he often sung several verses of primitive Christianity, particularly that,

O, that my Lord would count me meet,
To wash his dear disciples' feet!'

Sometimes he read many of those verses with tears streaming down his face. Thus did he walk with God, filled with the spirit of his beloved Lord, con-

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firming his love to all the family, and caring both for their spiritual and temporal concerns.

"My soul was much affected, when he asked each of us, in a sweet, humble manner, 'Can you give me your friend?' To think of parting was indeed grievous to us all. Yet we did not dare to withhold her from him; as we all believed the union was of God, and would be to their present and eternal benefit. The first sermon which he preached in Leeds, on the Sunday morning before the conference, will never be forgotten by any that heard it, who desire to be perfected in love. He preached in many places while in Yorkshire, and to numerous congregations. I have heard of many who were greatly blest thereby; some convinced, others set at liberty. And whenever he either preached or conversed, the comforts of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.

"Monday, November 12, was the day appointed for the outward uniting of those whose hearts were before united by the Holy Spirit: on the morning of this day, several friends met together on this solemn occasion; who can all, as well as me, truly say, 'I have been at one Christian wedding:' Jesus was invited, and truly he was at our *Cana*. We reached Cross-Hall before family prayers: Mr. Fletcher was dressed in his canonicals; and after giving out one of Mr. Wesley's marriage hymns, he read the seventh, eighth, and ninth verses of the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation; and spoke

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from them in such a manner, as greatly tended to spiritualize the solemnities of the day. He said, 'We invite you to our wedding; but the Holy Ghost here invites you to the marriage of the Lamb. The Bride, the Lamb's wife, has made herself ready. This Bride consists of the whole Church triumphant and militant united together. Ye may all be the bride, and Jesus will condescend to be the Bridegroom. Make yourself ready by being filled with the Spirit.' He was very solemn in prayer, and said, 'Lord, thou knowest we would not take this step, if we had not eternity in view, and if we were not as willing to be carried into the church-yard, as to go into the church.' At breakfast he reminded us, 'The postilions are now ready to carry us to the church, in order to see our nuptials solemnized; but Death will soon be here, to transport us to the marriage of the Lamb.'

"On the way to the church (Batley church, which was near two miles off), he spoke much of the mystery which is couched under marriages, namely—the union between Christ and his Church. 'The first Adam,' said he, 'received his wife from his side: our heavenly Adam purchased his bride by a fountain opened in his pierced side.' They were married in the face of the congregation; the doors were opened, and every one came in that would. We then returned home, and spent a considerable time in singing and prayer. We were near twenty of us. I then presented Mrs. Fletcher

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with some wedding hymns. She looked them over, and gave them to Mr. Fletcher. He read the scripture at the top, namely, '*Husbands, love your wives:* and added, '*As Christ loved the Church.*' Then turning to us, he said, 'My God, what a task! Help me, my friends, by your prayers, to fulfil it. As Christ loved the Church! He laid aside his glory for her! He submitted to be born into our world, to be clothed with a human body, subject to all our sinful infirmities. He endured shame, contempt, pain, yea, *death itself* for his church! O my God, none is able to fulfil this task, without thine almighty aid. Help me, O my God! Pray for me, O my friends!'

"He next read, '*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands.*' Mrs. Fletcher added, '*As unto the Lord.*' 'Well, my dear,' returned Mr. Fletcher, 'only in the Lord; and if ever I wish you to do any thing otherwise, resist me with all your might.' From dinner, which was a spiritual meal, as well as a natural one, until tea-time, our time was spent chiefly in fervent prayer or singing. After singing the covenant hymn, Mr. Fletcher went to Mrs. Fletcher, and said to her, 'Well, my dearest friend, will you join with me in joining ourselves in a perpetual covenant to the Lord? Will you with me serve him in his members? Will you help me to bring souls to the blessed Redeemer? And in every possible way, this day, lay yourself under the strongest ties you can, to help me to

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glorify my gracious Lord?' She answered, like one that well knew where her strength lay, 'May my God help me so to do!'

"In the evening Mr. Valton preached in the hall, from those most suitable words, '*What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord?*' His words did not fall to the ground: many were greatly refreshed. After preaching there was a sweet contest among us: every one thought, 'I in particular owe the greatest debt of praise;' till we jointly agreed to sing—

'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, or thought, or being last,
Or immortality endures.'

"On the Wednesday following the Select Society met; and it was a precious season. Among other things, Mr. Fletcher said, 'Some of you, perhaps, may be a little surprised at the step my dearest friend and I have taken. But I assure you, it was the result of much prayer and mature deliberation. Five and twenty years ago, when I first saw my dear wife, I thought, if I ever married, she should be the person. But she was too rich for me to think of. So I banished every thought of the kind. For many years after, I had a distaste to a married life, thinking it impossible to be as much devoted to God in a married as in a single life. But this objection was removed, by reading, '*Enoch begat sons and daughters. And Enoch*

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walked with God, and was not: for God took him.' I then saw, if *Enoch*, at the head of a family, might walk with God, and be fit for translation, our souls, under the gospel dispensation, might attain the highest degree of holiness in a similar state, if too great an attachment, leading the soul *from* God rather than to him, did not take place, instead of that which should be a means of increasing its union with Jesus. Yet still many obstacles stood in my way; but at length they were all removed. Every mountain became a plain, and we are both well assured, that the step we took, had the full approbation of God.'

"On January 2, 1782, we had a very solemn parting. But in the midst of all the sorrow which we felt, was a sweet assurance that we should meet again, not only in this world, but

'Where death shall all be done away,
And bodies part no more.'

This brings to my mind a sentence which he wrote to us, a little before his death. 'Time is short. It remains, that we die daily. Stand fast in Christ, the resurrection and the life. That we may have a happy meeting is the wish and prayer of

Your affectionate friends,
JOHN AND MARY FLETCHER.'

"To repeat all the precious sayings of this servant of God, would require many volumes; for his mouth was always opened with wisdom, tending to minister grace to the hearers. My earnest prayer

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is, that the spirit of faith and love, and heavenly wisdom, may rest upon *you* also, and guide you in all your extensive labours, till they are swallowed up in eternal rest.

I remain, Rev. Sir,
Your unworthy child and servant,
S. C."

I cannot help subjoining a reflection here, which, at this time, affected me much. Although I could in nowise condemn this marriage, yet on one account it gave me pain. When I was young, I was exceedingly affected with a relation in Mr. Herbert's life; an account of Mr. Farrar's family, at Little Giddings, in Huntingdonshire—a very particular description of which is given in the Arminian Magazine. I longed to see such another family in any part of the three kingdoms. At length I had my desire: I did see exactly such another family: I saw a family full as much devoted to God: full as regular in all their exercises of devotion, and at least as exemplary in every branch of Christian holiness. This I saw, by the peculiar providence of God, settled at Laton-Stone. O, that it had continued there! The removal of it into Yorkshire I did not advise, nor approve of. However I rejoiced to see it settled somewhere,—namely, at Cross-Hall, near Leeds. Again I did all that was in my power, to perpetuate this glorious institution. It was now totally dissolved; and yet by a means which I did not dare to oppose!

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O God, how unsearchable are thy judgments! And thy ways past finding out."

CHAPTER VIII.

From his Marriage till the beginning of his last Illness.

From the time of his settling at Madeley with Mrs. Fletcher he had no return of his consumptive disorder. On the contrary, by the blessing of God, on her peculiar care and tenderness, not only his health was confirmed, but his strength restored, as in the days of his youth. In the meantime, he took care to employ all his returning strength, in the work of faith and the labour of love. More particularly in that which he had always found to be one of the most difficult parts of his duty. We have in this parish, through the lenity of the magistrates, no less than eight public houses. These are well known to have been continual nurseries for sin, particularly on Sunday evenings. It had been for many years his unwearied endeavour to put an end to these abuses. Yet as he very seldom had a churchwarden who was heartily willing to second him therein, his endeavours were almost ineffectual, producing very little fruit. But for two

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years God was now pleased to favour him with a churchwarden who was resolved to act according to his oath: he then cheerfully renewed his endeavours, visiting several of these houses every Sunday (all of them in their turn.) In every one he bore a faithful testimony. And in some it has been attended with much good. O, that no one of those who have been at any time within the reach of his voice, may finally inherit that curse, "*Behold, ye despisers and wonder, and perish!*"

For many years he had felt, with the deepest sensibility, the disconsolate condition of poor uninstructed children: and some years ago, he began a school, wherein he taught them himself every day, After pursuing this method for some time, he erected a school in Madeley-wood. But afterwards his thoughts were much employed concerning the Sunday-schools; especially since they were recommended to him, in a letter from Mrs. Derby, a person whom he always found ready to promote every good work. He then earnestly set about promoting them in his own parish. Three hundred children were soon gathered together, whom he took every opportunity of instructing, by regular meetings, for some time before the schools were opened. These meetings he attended with the utmost diligence, to the very Thursday before his illness. In order to encourage the children, his method was to give them little hymn-books, pointing them to some friend or neighbour, who would teach

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them the hymns, and instruct them to sing. The little creatures were greatly taken with this new employment, insomuch that many of them would scarce allow themselves time to eat or sleep, for the desire they had of learning their lessons. At every meeting, after inquiring who had made the greatest proficiency, he distinguished them by some little reward.

In the instructing of children, one great difficulty is, to draw and fix their attention. He had a singular gift for doing this, by taking advantage of any incident that offered. One day, while he had a considerable number of children before him in the preaching-house, as he was persuading them to mind what they were about, and to remember the text which he was going to mention, just then a robin flew into the house, and their eyes were presently turned after him. "Now," said he, "I see you can attend to that robin. Well, I will take that robin for my text." He then gave them a useful lecture on the harmlessness of that little creature, and the tender care of its Creator.

When he observed, that the number of children, instead of falling off, as was expected, increased continually, he wrote some proposals to the parish, which were received with the greatest unanimity. Many of the rich as well as the trading people, lent their helping hand, not only to defray the expense of teachers, but also to raise a convenient house in

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Coalbrook-Dale, for the instruction of the numerous children that were on that side of the parish.

The proposal was as follows:—"Our national depravity turns greatly on these two hinges, The profanation of the Lord's day, and, The neglect of the education of children. Till some way is found of stopping up these two great inlets of wickedness, we must expect to see our work-houses filled with aged parents forsaken by their prodigal children, with wives forsaken by their faithless husbands, and with the wretched offspring of lewd women, and drunken men. Nay, we may expect to see the gaols, and even the gallows largely stocked (to the perpetual reproach of our nation) with unhappy wretches, ready to fall a sacrifice to the laws of their own country. 'It is a common observation,' (says Dr. Gibson, late bishop of London), 'that public criminals, when they come to their unhappy end, and make their dying declarations to the world, generally charge the sinful courses, in which they have lived, to the *neglect and abuse of the Lord's day*, as the first occasion of leading them into all other wickedness. And considering how frequently these declarations are repeated, and how many other instances of the same kind, though less public, are notorious enough to those who will observe them; they may well be a warning to us, to consider a religious observation of the Lord's day, as the best preservative of virtue and religion, and the

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neglect and profanation of it, as the greatest inlet to vice and wickedness.'

"A pious clergyman farther observes, 'The want of education in children, is one of the principal causes of the misery of families, cities, and nations; ignorance, vice, and misery being constant companions. The hardest heart must melt at the melancholy sight of such a number of children, both male and female, who live in gross ignorance and habitual profanation of the Lord's day. What crowds fill the streets and fields, tempting each other to idleness, lewdness, and every other species of wickedness! Is it any wonder we should have so many undutiful children, unfaithful apprentices, disobedient servants, untrusty workmen, disloyal subjects, and bad members of society? Whence so much rapine, fornication, and blasphemy? Do not all these evils centre in *ignorance and contempt of the Lord's day!* And shall we do nothing to check these growing evils?'

"Persons concerned for the welfare of the next generation, and well-wishers to church and state, have already set us a fair example in Stroud, Gloucester, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, and many country parishes. They have attempted to remedy these evils, by setting up Sunday schools, which, by keeping children from corrupting one another, by promoting their attendance on divine worship, and by planting the first principles of useful knowledge in their minds, and of piety in their

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hearts, bid fair for a public reformation of manners, and for nipping in the bud, the ignorance and impiety which is every where so common among the lower and more numerous classes of people."

The proposals concerning Sunday-schools, in the parish of Madeley, were as follows:

I.—It is proposed that Sunday-schools be set up in this parish, for such children as are employed all the week, and for those whose education has been hitherto totally neglected.

II.—That the children admitted into these, be taught reading, writing, and the principles of religion.

III.—That there be a school for boys and another for girls, in Madeley, Madeley-wood, and Coalbrook Dale—six in all.

IV.—That a subscription be opened to pay each teacher, one shilling per Sunday, and to buy tables, forms, books, pens, and ink.

V.—That two treasurers be appointed to ask and receive the contributions of the subscribers.

VI.—That whoever subscribes one guinea a year, shall be a governor.

VII.—That three or four inspectors be appointed, who are to visit the schools once a week, to see that the children attend regularly, and the masters do their duty.

VIII.—That a book be provided for setting down all receipts and expenses; and another for the names of the teachers and the scholars.

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IX.—That the schools be solemnly visited once or twice a year, and a premium given to the children that have made the greatest improvement.

As to the success of his unwearied labours, although he was much discouraged when he first returned from abroad, finding so many of those who had once run well, grown weary and faint in their mind; yet it was not long before he found fresh cause to rejoice, and to know that God was with him of a truth. It was not long before he observed that a general reformation had taken place in the parish. And it was not only an outward reformation, even of many that had been notorious for all manner of wickedness, but an inward also; many, both young and old, having learned to worship *God in spirit and in truth.* A considerable number of these still mourn, as sheep bereaved of their shepherd. And yet one cannot doubt, but a still larger company of his own children have hailed him on the celestial shore. But the season is coming when all secrets shall be laid open, and all the jewels of his crown shall be made manifest in that day.

One instance of the success of his ministry, he mentioned some years since at Bristol. "One Sunday," said he, "when I had done reading prayers at Madeley, I went up into the pulpit, intending to preach a sermon, which I had prepared for that purpose. But my mind was so confused, that I could not recollect either my text or any part of my sermon. I was afraid I should be obliged to

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come down without saying any thing. But having recollected myself a little, I thought I would say something on the first lesson, which was the third chapter of Daniel, containing the account of the three children cast into the fiery furnace: I found in doing it such an extraordinary assistance from God, and such a peculiar enlargement of heart, that I supposed there must be some peculiar cause for it. I therefore desired, if any of the congregation found any thing particular, they would acquaint me with it in the ensuing week.

"In consequence of this, the Wednesday after, a woman came, and gave me the following account: 'I have been for some time much concerned about my soul. I have attended the church at all opportunities, and have spent much time in private prayer. At this, my husband (who is a baker) has been exceedingly enraged, and threatened me severely what he would do, if I did not leave off going to John Fletcher's church: yea, if I dared to go any more to any religious meetings whatsoever. When I told him, I could not, in conscience, refrain from going at least to our parish church, he grew quite outrageous, and swore dreadfully, if I went any more, he would cut my throat as soon as I came home. This made me cry mightily to God, that he would support me in the trying hour. And though I did not feel any great degree of comfort, yet having a sure confidence in God, I determined to go on in my duty, and leave the event to him. Last

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Sunday, after many struggles with the devil and my own heart, I came down stairs ready for church. My husband asked me whether I was resolved to go thither. I told him I was. 'Well then,' said he, 'I shall not (as I intended) cut your throat, but I will heat the oven, and throw you into it the moment you come home.' Notwithstanding this threatening, which he enforced with many bitter oaths, I went to church, praying all the way, that God would strengthen me to suffer whatever might befal me. While you was speaking of the three children whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the burning fiery furnace, I found it all belonged to *me*, and God applied every word to my heart. And when the sermon was ended, I thought, if I had a thousand lives, I could lay them all down for God. I felt my whole soul so filled with his love, that I hastened home, fully determined to give myself to whatsoever God pleased: nothing doubting, but that either he would take me to heaven, if he suffered me to be burnt to death, or that he would some way or other deliver me, even as he did his three *servants that trusted in him*. When I got almost to our own door, I saw the flames issuing out of the mouth of the oven; and I expected nothing else, but that I should be thrown into it immediately. I felt my heart rejoice, that if it were so, the will of the Lord would be done. I opened the door, and to my utter astonishment, saw my husband upon his knees, wrestling with

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God in prayer for the forgiveness of his sins. He caught me in his arms, earnestly begging my pardon, and has continued diligently seeking God ever since.' I now know why my sermon was taken from me—namely, that God might thus magnify his mercy."

Many were the dangers he went through in the course of his ministry; but the Lord delivered him out of all. One of these Mrs. Fletcher relates in the following words:

"My husband having appointed to preach one Sunday at a church, about fourteen miles off, I felt some concern for his riding so far, and doing the whole Sunday's duty twice—especially as it was necessary for him to return home the same night. The evening being exceeding dark and wet, I was strongly led to commend him to God in prayer. While I was doing this it was suggested to me, that his horse was fallen, and had thrown him over his head; and the whole scene appeared to be clearly represented before my eyes. 'My God,' said I, 'he is thine. His life, his limbs, his health, are all thine! I commit him to thee by faith.' Immediately that word was imprest on my heart, '*The righteous is in the hand of the Lord: and there shall no evil touch him.*' And it empowered my soul with such a sweetness, that I could feel no fear. The night was uncommonly bad, which occasioned many friends to continue with me. And while they expressed their great uneasiness at his

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staying two hours longer than we could well account for, I was obliged to hide the calmness I felt by silence, lest some should have supposed it insensibility.* At last he came well, and praising God; but asked for water, to wash himself, because his horse had fallen, and thrown him with great force over his head. Yet, glory be to God, he was no way hurt, except having a little skin grazed from one of his fingers. As he set the Lord always before him, so he found his help in every time of need."

The laying the foundation of the Sunday-schools at Madeley, was the last public work in which he was employed. But as the liberal man is ever devising liberal things, he had several plans in his mind, for preserving a great number of desolate children, brought up only to beg and steal. Such this populous parish (and indeed most others), afford in great abundance. He had likewise proposed writing various little tracts,† for the use of the schools. But he who cannot err, saw good to call his servant hence to *enjoy* rather than leave him here to *do* and *suffer*.

* Nay I would have proclaimed it aloud, giving the glory to God, for the comfort of all that were present.

† I do not regret his not living to write those tracts; because I despair of seeing any in the English tongue superior to those extracts from Abbe Fleury and Mr. Poiret, published under the title of "Instructions for Children." I have never yet seen any thing comparable to them, either for depth of sense, or plainness of language,

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CHAPTER IX.

His Character.

I AM sensible, it is the method of almost all writers, to place the character of a man at the conclusion of his life. But there seems to be a particular reason for varying from the usual practice in this place. The death of Mr. Fletcher (hardly to be paralleled in the present century) was so uncommon a display of the power and goodness of God in behalf of his highly-favoured servant, that it is not proper for any thing to come after it. It must needs therefore close the whole account.

From even the imperfect account, which has been given of this great and good man, any discerning person may, with very little difficulty, extract his character. In general, it is easy to perceive, that a more excellent man has not appeared in the church for some ages. It is true, in several ages, and in several countries, many men have excelled in particular virtues and graces. But who can point out, in any age or nation, one that so highly excelled in all? One that was enabled in so large a measure to '*put on the whole armour of God*?' Yea, so to *put on Christ*, as to *perfect holiness in the fear of God!*

Yet there is a particular difficulty in giving a full account of either his life or character, because

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we have scarce any light from himself. He was, upon all occasions, very uncommonly reserved in speaking of himself, whether in writing or conversation. He hardly ever said any thing concerning himself, unless it slipped from him unawares. And among the great number of papers which he has left, there is scarce a page (except that single account of his conversion to God), relative either to his own inward experience, or the transactions of his life. So that most of the information we have is gathered up either from short hints scattered up and down in his letters, from what he had occasionally dropped among his friends, or from what one and another remembered concerning him. In writing the lives and characters of eminent men, the Roman Catholics have a great advantage over us. The pious members of the church of Rome make a conscience of not concealing any thing from their directors, but disclose to them all the circumstances of their lives, and all the secrets of their hearts: whereas very few of the Protestants disclose to others, even their most intimate friends, what passes betwen God and their own souls—at least, not of set purpose. Herein they forget, or at least disregard, that wise remark of the ancient writers (exactly agreeable to various passages that occur in the canonical Scriptures), '*It is good to conceal the secrets of a king, but to declare the loving-kindness of the Lord.*'

This defect was indeed in some measure supplied,

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by the entire intimacy which subsisted between him and Mrs. Fletcher. He did not willingly, much less designedly, conceal any thing from her. They had no secrets with regard to each other; but had indeed one house, one purse, and one heart. Before her it was his invariable rule, to *think aloud*—always to open the window in his breast. And to this we are indebted for the knowledge of many particulars, which must otherwise have been buried in oblivion.

But whatever the materials were, however complete our informations, yet I am thoroughly sensible of my own inability to draw such a portrait as Mr. Fletcher deserves. I have no turn at all for panegyric; I have never accustomed myself to it. It gives me therefore, no small satisfaction to find that this is, in a great measure, done to my hands. The picture is already drawn, and that by no mean pencil. All then, which I shall attempt is, to retouch Mrs. Fletcher's observations, and now and then to add a few articles, either from my own knowledge, or from the information of others.

The following are mostly her own words, for where they are clear and expressive, as they generally are, I do not think it right to alter them, for altering sake.

"Whatever he might be, with regard to *charity*," said she, "He was no less eminent for his spirit of *faith*. Indeed he was not so much led by sights or impressions (which many mistake for faith) as

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abundance of people have been; but by a steady firm reliance upon the love and truth and faithfulness of God. His ardent desire was, so to believe, as to be a partaker of all the great and precious promises; to be a witness of all that mind which was in Christ Jesus. And being conscious that he must be crucified with his Master, or never reign with him, he gave himself up to him, whom he continually set before him, to lie in his hand as the passive clay. He would often say, 'It is my business in all events, to hang upon the Lord, with a sure trust and confidence, that he will order all things in the best time and manner.' Indeed it would be nothing to be a believer, nay, in truth, there would be no room for faith, if every thing were seen here. But against hope to believe in hope, to have a full confidence in that unseen power, which so mightily supports us in all our dangers and difficulties, this is the believing which is acceptable to God. Sometimes when I have expressed some apprehension of an approaching trial, he would answer, 'I do not doubt but the Lord orders all; therefore, I leave every thing to him.' In outward dangers, if they were ever so great, he seemed to know no shadow of fear. When I was speaking once, concerning a danger, to which we were then particularly exposed, he answered, 'I know God always gives his angels charge concerning us; therefore, we are equally safe every where.'

'Not less eminent than his faith was his *humi-*

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lity. Amidst all his laying himself out for God and for the good of souls, he ever preserved that special grace—the making no account of his own labours. He held himself and his own abilities, in very low esteem; and seemed to have that word continually before his eyes, 'I am an unprofitable servant.' And this humility was so rooted in him, as to be moved by no affront. I have seen many, even of the most provoking kind, offered him; but he received them as his *proper portion:* being so far from desiring the honour which cometh of men, that he took pleasure in being little and unknown. Perhaps it might appear from some passages of his life, that in this he even leaned to an extreme; for genuine humility does not require that any man should *desire to be despised.* Nay we are to avoid it, so far as we possibly can, consistently with a good conscience; for that direction, '*Let no man despise thee,*' concerns every man as well as Timothy.

"It is rare to meet with an eminent person that can bear an equal; but it was his choice and his delight, to prefer every one to himself. And this he did in so free and easy a manner, that in him it appeared perfectly natural. He never willingly suffered any unkindness shown to him to be mentioned again; and if it was, he generally answered, 'O, let it drop, we will offer it in silence to the Lord.' And indeed the best way of bearing crosses is, to consecrate all in silence to God.

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"From this root of humility sprung such a *patience*, as I wish I could either describe or imitate. It produced in him a most ready mind, which embraced every cross with alacrity and pleasure; for the good of his neighbour, nothing seemed hard, nothing wearisome. Sometimes I have been grieved to call him out of his study two or three times in an hour; especially when he was engaged in composing some of his deepest works. But he would answer with his usual sweetness, 'O my dear, never think of that: it matters not, if we are but always ready to meet the will of God.' It is conformity to the will of God that alone makes an employment excellent; he never thought any thing too mean, but sin; he looked on nothing else as beneath his character. If he overtook a poor man or woman on the road, with a burden too heavy for them, he did not fail to offer his assistance to bear part of it, and he would not easily take a denial. This, therefore, he has frequently done.

"In bearing pain he was most exemplary, and continued more and more so to the last. Nor was it least remarkable in the most humbling part of the ministry—the coming down to the capacities of the Ignorant. Nevertheless he had a most resolute courage, in the reproving of sin; to daring sinners he was a Son of Thunder; and no worldly considerations were regarded, whenever he believed God had given him a message to deliver to any of them.

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"One considerable part of humility is, to know our own place and stand therein—Every member has its peculiar appointment in the human body, where the wise Master-builder has placed it. And it is well, while each continues in its place. But as every dislocated bone gives pain, and must continue so to do, till it is replaced in its proper socket; so every dislocated affection must give pain to the soul, till it is restored to its own place; till it is totally fixt in God—till we resign our whole selves to the disposal of infinite wisdom. This is the proper place of every rational creature; and in this place he invariably stood. Whatever he believed to be the will of God, he resolutely performed, though it were to pluck out a right eye, to lay his Isaac on the altar. When it appeared that God called him to any journey, he immediately prepared for it, without the least hesitation: although for the last years of his life, he hardly ever travelled to any considerable distance, without feeling some tendency to a relapse into his former distemper. And it was usually some weeks after his return, before he recovered his usual strength."

Humility continually produces *meekness*, and the latter bears an exact proportion to the former. I received a letter on this head but a few days since, which it may not be improper to subjoin.

"Rev. Sir,

"I was yesterday, in company with several clergymen, who among other things mentioned Mr.

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Fletcher, and seemed particularly anxious, that in the account of his Life, a proper degree of caution should be observed, in the panegyric that may be applied to his character. They say he was extremely passionate; and that there was in many instances, an austere severity and rigour in his conduct to the young people under his care, particularly at Trevecka. As this information comes from a gentleman, eminent for his knowledge of mankind, and universally esteemed as one of the greatest geniuses of the age, and one whose veracity has never been questioned, it will have no small weight in the learned world."

I am glad this information came to my hands in time, as it may now receive so sufficient an answer as will probably satisfy every candid and impartial reader.

Two things are here asserted concerning Mr. Fletcher:—the first, That he was extremely passionate; the second, That there was an austere severity and rigour in his conduct towards the young persons under his care, particularly at Trevecka. The former assertion is unquestionably true: such he was *by nature*. The latter I question much, with regard to his conduct at Tern, as well as at Trevecka. None can be a more competent witness of his conduct at Tern, than Mr. Vaughan, who lived so long in the same house; and whose testimony concerning him has been so largely given in the preceding pages. But waiving this: can it

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possibly be supposed that either Mr. Hill or his sons, then verging towards manhood, would have borne the austere rigour and severity of a young man that received his bread from them? Yea, and that year after year! Surely the supposition shocks all credibility.

Equally incredible is the assertion of his "austere severity and rigour," towards the young men at Trevecka. This is inconsistent with the whole account given by Mr. Benson, an eye and ear witness of all his conduct. Had it been true in any degree, would it have been possible that he should have been so esteemed and beloved by those very young men? I cannot form the least conjecture whence such an assertion could arise, unless it was invented by some young man after Mr. Fletcher was dismissed, in order to ingratiate himself with his patroness.

The farther account which Mr. Benson gives of him from personal knowledge is this: "Mr. Fletcher," says he, "was naturally a man of strong passions, and prone to anger in particular: insomuch that he has frequently thrown himself on the floor, and laid there most of the night bathed in tears, imploring victory over his own spirit." And he did not strive in vain—he did obtain the victory in a very eminent degree. For twenty years and upwards before his death, no one ever saw him out of temper, or heard him utter a rash expression on any provocation whatever. I have often thought

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the testimony that Bishop Burnet (in the history of his own times) bears of Archbishop Leighton, might be borne of him with equal propriety. "After an intimate acquaintance with the Archbishop for many years, and after being with him by night and by day, at home and abroad, in public and in private, on sundry occasions and in various affairs, I must say, I never heard an idle word drop from his lips, nor any conversation which was not to the use of edifying. I never saw him in any temper in which I myself would not have wished to be found at death." Any that has been intimately acquainted with Mr. Fletcher, will say the same of him: but they that knew him best will say it with the most assurance.

His *disengagements from the world, and love of the poor*, Mrs. Fletcher joins together: "Never," says she, "did I behold any one more dead to the things of the world. His treasure was above, and so was his heart also. He always remembered that admonition of the Apostle, '*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the things of this life.*' It was his constant endeavour to preserve a mind free and disencumbered; and he was exceeding wary of undertaking any business that might distract and hurry it. Yet in his worldly concerns, knowing himself to be a steward for God, he would not through carelessness waste one penny. He likewise judged it to be his bounden duty to demand what he knew to be his right. And yet he could well

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reconcile this with that word, '*He that will have thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.*' Indeed whether he had less or more, it was the same thing upon his own account; as he had no other use for it, but to spread the gospel and to assist the poor. And he frequently said, he never was happier than when he had given away the last penny he had in his house. If at any time I had gold in my drawers, it seemed to afford him no comfort; but if he could find a handful of small silver, when he was going out to see the sick, he would express as much pleasure over it as a miser would in discovering a bag of hid treasure. He was never better pleased with my employment, than when he had set me to prepare food or physic for the poor. He was hardly able to relish his dinner, if some sick neighbour had not a part of it: and sometimes if any one of them was in want, I could not keep the linen in his drawers. On Sundays he provided for numbers of people who came from a distance to hear the word; and his house as well as his heart was devoted to their convenience—to relieve them that were afflicted in body or mind, was the delight of his heart. Once a poor man who feared God, being brought into great difficulties, he took down all the pewter from the kitchen shelves, saying—'This will help *you*, and I can do without it: a wooden trencher will serve *me* just as well.' In epidemic and contagious distempers, when the neighbours were afraid to nurse the sick, he has

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gone from house to house, seeking some that were willing to undertake it. And when none could be found, he has offered his service, to sit up with them himself. But this was his first setting out here. At present there appears in many (and has done so for many years) a most ready mind to visit and relieve the distressed.

"He thoroughly complied with that advice:

> "Give to all something: to a good poor man,
> Till thou change hands, and be where he began."

I have heard him say, that when he lived alone in his house, the tears have come into his eyes, when one has brought him five or six insignificant letters, at three or fourpence a piece; and perhaps he had only a single shilling in the house, to distribute among the poor to whom he was going. He frequently said to me, 'O Polly, can we not do without beer? Let us drink water, and eat less meat. Let our necessities give way to the extremities of the poor."

"But with all his generosity and charity he was strictly careful to follow the advice of the Apostle, '*Owe no man any thing*.' He contracted no debt. While he gave all he had, he made it a rule to pay ready money for every thing, believing this was the best way to keep the mind unencumbered and free from care. Meanwhile his substance, his time, his strength, his life, were devoted to the service of the poor. And last of all he gave *me* to them; for when we were married, he asked me solemnly, whether

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I was willing to marry his parish. And the first time he led me among his people in this place, he said, 'I have not married this wife only for myself, but for *you*. I asked her of the Lord, for *your* comfort, as well as my own.'

"All his life, as well as during his illness, particularly at Newington and Brislington (as has been largely related) he was *grateful* in a very high degree, to those who conferred the least benefit upon him; yea, or even endeavoured so to do. One of these was Mr. Richard Edwards, of London, to whose care he was committed as a leader, when he was first admitted into the London Society. A lively sense of the kindness which Mr. Edwards then showed him, he retained to the end of his life. This he testified by repeated letters; one or two of which it may be well to transcribe.

'Tern, Oct. 19, 1756.

'Dearest Brother,

'This is to let you know, that (praise be to the Lord) I am very well in body and pretty well in soul—but I have very few Christian friends here. And God has been pleased to take away the chief of those few by a most comfortable death; and lately I heard that my aged father is gone the way of all flesh. But the glorious circumstances of his death made me ample amends for the sorrow which I felt. For some years I have wrote to him with much freedom as I could have done to a son, though not with so much effect as I wished. But

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last spring God visited him with a severe illness, which brought him to a sense of himself. And after a deep repentance, he died about a month ago, in the full assurance of faith. This has put several of my friends on thinking seriously, which affords me great cause of thankfulness. I am,

Your unworthy Brother
And Servant in the Lord,
JOHN FLETCHER.'

"Two years after he wrote to him as follows:

'I thank you for your encouraging observations. I want them, and use them by the grace of God. When I received yours, I had not had one opportunity of preaching—so incensed were all the clergy against me. One, however, let me have the use of his church, (the abbey church at Shrewsbury.) I preached in the forenoon with some degree of the demonstration of the Spirit. The congregation was very numerous; and, I believe, one half at least desired to hear me again. But the minister would not let me have the pulpit any more. The next Sunday the minister of a neighbouring parish lying a dying, I was sent for to officiate for him. He died a few days after, and the chief man in the parish offered to make interest, that I might succeed him; but I could not consent. The next Sunday I preached at Shrewsbury again; but in another church. The next day I set out for Bristol, and was much refreshed among the brethren. As I

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returned I called at New-Kingswood, about sixteen miles from Bristol. The minister offering me his church, I preached to a numerous congregation, gathered in about half an hour's notice. I think the seed then sown will not be lost.'

"Another uncommon talent which God had given him," says Mrs. F. "was a peculiar *sensibility* of spirit. He had a temper the most feeling of any I ever knew. Hardly a night passed over, but some part of it was spent in groans for the souls and bodies committed to his care. I dreaded his hearing, either of the sins or sufferings of any of his people, before the time of his going to bed—knowing how strong the impressions would be on his mind, chasing the sleep from his eyes.

"And yet I have heard him speak of a time, twelve or fourteen years ago, when he was greatly tempted to think that he was not sensible enough of the afflictions of his fellow-creatures. He thought Christ bore our infirmities, and carried our sorrows; 'But,' said he, 'I have not that Christ-like temper: I do not bear the sorrows of others.' After being for some time buffeted with this temptation, he prayed, that a measure of this spirit might be given him. Not long after, as he was visiting a poor sick family, so lively a sense of their affliction, on a sudden, fell upon his mind, that he could scarce get home. As soon as he sat down in his house, his soul was penetrated with such a sense of the woes of mankind, as utterly depressed and

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overcame him, and drank up his spirits, insomuch that he could not help himself, nor move from one chair to another. And he was no more able to walk or help himself, than a new-born child. At the same time he seemed to lose the use of his memory, and of all his faculties. He thought, 'What is this? Is it a disease? Is it a stroke of the palsy? Rather is it not an answer to my own ill-judged, though well-intended prayer? Did I not ask a burden unsuitable to a finite, and capable of being borne only by an infinite being?' He remained some hours in this situation. Then it came into his mind, 'If this is a purely natural event, the will of the Lord be done! But if it be the answer to an improper prayer, God will answer again by removing it.' He cried to the Lord, and was immediately restored to strength both of body and mind.

"When we were at Leeds, in the year 1784, I had another proof of the tender sensibility of his heart. O, how deeply was he affected, concerning the welfare of his brethren! When any little disputes arose between them, his inmost soul groaned under the burden; and by two or three o'clock in the morning, I was sure to hear him breathing out prayer for the peace and prosperity of Sion. When I observed to him, I was afraid it would hurt his health, and wished him to sleep more, he would answer, 'O Polly, the cause of God lies near my heart!'

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"Towards *me*, his tenderness was exerted in its utmost extent. My soul, my body, my health, my ease and comfort, were his daily study. We had no thought, either past or present, which we purposely concealed from each other. My spiritual advancement was his constant endeavour; and to this he was continually stirring me up, inviting me to walk more closely with God, urging that thought, 'O my dear, let us pray for dying grace; for we shall not be long here.' His temporal affairs he committed solely to me, though he was always ready to assist me in the smallest matters.

"One article more remains to be spoken of, namely, his *communion with God*. Although he enjoyed this, more or less, at all times, and in all places, yet I have frequently heard him observe, that the seasons of his closest communion were always in his own house, or in the church—usually in the latter. It is much to be lamented, that we have no account of it from his own pen. It was his constant endeavour to maintain an uninterrupted sense of the presence of God. In order to this, he was slow of speech, and had the greatest government of his words. Indeed, he both acted, and spoke, and thought, as under the eye of God. And thus setting God always before him, he remained unmoved in all occurrences; at all times and on every occasion, possessing inward recollection. Nor did I ever see him diverted therefrom, on any occasion whatever, either going out or coming in, whether

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by ourselves or in company. Sometimes he took his journies alone; but above a thousand miles I have travelled with him; during which, neither change of company, place, nor the variety of circumstances, which naturally occur in travelling, ever seemed to make the least difference in his firm attention on the presence of God. To preserve this uniform habit of soul, he was so watchful and recollected, that to such as were unexperienced in these things, it might appear like insensibility. Although no one could converse in a more lively and sensible manner, even on natural things, when he saw it was to the glory of God. He was always striving to raise his own, and every other spirit, to a close and immediate intercourse with God. And I can say with truth, all his union with me was so intermingled with prayer and praise, that every employment, and every meal, was, as it were, perfumed therewith."

I had concluded what I proposed to say, concerning the *character* of Mr. Fletcher, when I received a long letter from Mr. Benson, an extract of which I cannot withhold from the reader. For although most of the particulars hereof are contained in the preceding pages, yet as they are here placed in quite another order, and have also several new circumstances intermixed, I could not doubt of their being both agreeable and profitable to every person of piety.

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"As to *drawing* the character of that great and good man," says Mr. Benson, "it is what I will not attempt; but if I can suggest any thing that will *assist* you therein, I shall think my little labour well bestowed. With this view I have been looking over many of his letters, and observe in them all, what I have a thousand times observed in his conversation and behaviour—the plainest marks of every Christian grace and virtue.

"Perhaps if he followed his Master more closely in one thing than another, it was in *humility*. It is one branch of poverty of spirit (another word for humility) to think meanly of ourselves. As he certainly thought meanly of himself, both as a *Christian*, as a *Preacher*, and as a *Writer*. I need not say how he shone in all those characters; but he knew not that he shone in any of them. How low an opinion he had of himself as a Christian, manifestly appears from his placing himself at the feet of all, and showing a continual desire to learn from every company he was in. He paid all due deference to the judgment of others, readily acknowledged whatever was good in them, and seemed to think himself the only person in whom there dwelt no excellency worth notice. Hence it was, that he often wrote and spoke, as if he had not received that grace, which he undoubtedly had received. And indeed, he overlooked what he had attained, through the eager desire he had of higher and greater things. Many of his letters show how

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very meanly he thought of his own attainments as a Christian; through the continually increasing views which he had of the Divine Purity, and of the high degree of conformity thereto, which is attainable even in this world.

"And however little he was in his own eyes as a *Christian*, he was equally so as a *Writer* and a *Preacher*. In consequence of the mean opinion he had of his own abilities, he gladly offered what he wrote to be corrected by any friend, however inferior to himself. Thus, in a letter, dated Nov. 23, 1771, he says, 'I have sent a letter of fifty pages upon Antinomianism. I beg upon my bended knees, you would revise and correct it. I have followed my light, small as it is. Put yours to mine.' What a mean opinion he had of his own *writings*, appears from a letter, written March 20, 1774. 'I do not repent of my having engaged in this controversy; for though I doubt my little publication cannot reclaim those who are confirmed in believing the lie of the day, yet they may here and there, stop one from swallowing it at all, or at least from swallowing it so deeply.' Two years after he says, 'I have almost run my race of scribbling; and I have preached as much as I could, though to little purpose; but I must not complain. If one person has received good by my ten years' labour it is an honour for which I cannot be too thankful, if my mind were as low as it should be. Let us bless the Lord in all things.'

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"As difficult as it is to think meanly of ourselves, it is still more difficult to be willing that others should think meanly of us. And how eminent he was in this, appears from hence, that he was constantly upon his guard, lest any expression should drop either from his lips or pen, which tended to make any one think well of him; either on account of his family, or learning, or parts, or usefulness. Yea, he took as much pains to *conceal* his excellencies, as others do to *show* them—having the same desire to be little and unknown, which many have to be known and esteemed.

"It would have remained a secret in this kingdom, even to his most intimate friends, that he was of so great a family, had not Mr Ireland gone over with him to Switzerland, where he was surprised to find Mr. Fletcher's relations some of the first people in the country.

"'*Blessed are they that mourn*,' said the Lord Jesus. And this blessedness was as certainly his as the former. He was a man of a serious spirit one that stood at the utmost distance from levity of every kind. Though he was constantly cheerful, as rejoicing in hope of his heavenly inheritance, yet had he too deep a sense of his own wants, and the wants of the church of God, as also of the sins and miseries of mankind, to be any time light or trifling. I have a letter before me (dated December, 1771) which at once gives us a picture of his seriousness, watchfulness, and earnestness;

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and contains advices well deserving the consideration of all that fear God.——'There is, undoubtedly,' said he, 'such a thing as the *full assurance of faith.* Be not discouraged on account of thousands who stop short of it; it is our own fault if we do not attain.—God would give us ample satisfaction if we did but deeply feel our wants. Both you and I want a deeper awakening, which will produce a death to outward things and speculative knowledge. Let us shut our eyes to the gilded clouds without us: let us draw inward and search after God, if haply we may find him. Let us hold our confidence, though we are often constrained against hope to believe in hope. But let us not rest in our confidence, as thousands do: let it help us to struggle and wait till he come. Let us habituate ourselves to live inwardly. This will solemnize us, and prevent our trifling with the things of God. We may be thankful for what we have, without resting in it. We may strive, and yet not trust in our striving; but expect all from divine grace.'

"Four or five years after, he says, 'I send this to inquire after your welfare, and to let you know, that, though I am pretty well in body, yet I break fast. But I want to break faster in my spirit than I do. Yet, blessed be God, I have been in such pinching, grinding circumstances, for near a year, by a series of providential and domestic trials, as having given me some deadly blows. I am not

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without hope of setting my eyes on you once more. Mr. Wesley kindly invites me to travel with him, and visit some of the societies. I feel an inclination to break one of my chains—parochial retirement—which may be a nest for self-indulgence. I leave the matter entirely to the Lord.'

"Meantime he mourned, not only for himself and his friends, but also for the church of God. The few professors,' says he, 'which I see in these parts, are so far from what I wish them to be, that I cannot but cry out, Lord, how long wilt thou give thy heritage up to desolation? How long shall the heathen say, *Where is now their* (indwelling) *God?*' In another letter he writes (dated May 8, 1776), 'I see so little fruit in these parts, that I am almost disheartened. I am closely followed with the thought, that faith, in the dispensation of the spirit, is at a very low ebb. But it may be better in other places. I shall be glad to travel a little to see the goodness of the land. May God make, and keep us humble, loving, disinterested, and zealous."

"These quotations give us not only an example of *holy mourning*, but likewise of *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*. In this he was peculiarly worthy of our imitation. He never rested in any thing he had either experienced or done in spiritual matters. *But this one thing he* did, *forgetting those things that* were *behind, and reaching forth unto those things which* were *before*, he *pressed*

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toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He was a true Christian racer, always on the stretch for higher and better things. Though his attainments, both in experience and usefulness, were above the common standard, yet the language of his conversation and behaviour always was, '*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfected; but I follow after, if by any means I may apprehend that, for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*' He had his eye upon a full conformity to the Son of God; or what the Apostle terms, '*The measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*' Nor could he be satisfied with any thing less.

"And he was *meek*, like his Master, as well as *lowly in heart.* Not that he was so by nature, but of a fiery, passionate spirit. But so thoroughly had grace subdued nature, so fully was he renewed in the spirit of his mind, that for many years before his death, I believe he was never observed by any one, friend or foe, to be out of temper. And yet he did not want provocation, and that sometimes in a high degree, especially from those whose religious sentiments he thought it his duty to oppose. One of these, who once loved him so well, as to be ready to pull out his eyes for him, was so exasperated, on reading his second Check, that he wrote to him in the most bitter terms. But none of these things moved him, no not in the least degree. The keen-

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est word he used upon the occasion was, 'What a world, what a religious world we live in!'

"Hence arose his readiness to bear with the weaknesses, and forgive the faults of others—the more remarkable, considering his flaming zeal against sin, and deep concern for the glory of God. Such hatred to sin, and such love to the sinner, I never saw joined together before. This very circumstance convinced me of the height of his grace, bearing so much of his Master's image, whose hatred to sin and love to sinners are equally infinite. He took all possible pains to detect what was evil, in any of those that were under his care; pursuing it through all its turnings and windings, and stripping it of all its disguises. Yet none so ready to excuse, when it was confest, and to conceal it, even from his most intimate friends.

"He never mentioned the faults of an absent person, unless absolute duty required it. And then he spoke with the utmost tenderness, extenuating, rather than aggravating. None could draw his picture more exactly than St. Paul has done, in the thirteenth of the first epistle to the Corinthians. Every feature in that masterly piece of apostolic painting was found in him. Let all that knew him, especially his intimate friends, recollect the spirit and behaviour of this servant of the God of love; and then let them judge whether I exaggerate when I say, *He suffered long and was kind; he envied not; acted not rashly; was not puffed up; did not*

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behave himself unseemly; sought not his own; was not easily provoked. He thought no evil; rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth. He covered all things; believed all things; hoped all things; and endured all things. It would be easy to enlarge on all these particulars, and show how they were exemplified in him. But waiving this, I would only observe, that, with regard to two of them, *kindness* to others, and *not seeking his own*, he had few equals. His *kindness* to others was such, that he bestowed his all upon them—his time, his talents, his substance. His knowledge, his eloquence, his health, his money, were employed day by day for the good of mankind. He prayed, he wrote, he preached, he visited the sick and well; he conversed, he gave, he laboured, he suffered, winter and summer, night and day; he endangered, nay, destroyed his health, and in the end gave his life also for the profit of his neighbours, that they might be saved from everlasting death. He denied himself even such food as was necessary for him, that he might have to give to them that had none. And when he was constrained to change his manner of living, still his diet was plain and simple. And so were his clothing and furniture, that he might save all that was possible for his poor neighbours.

"He *sought not his own* in any sense, not his own honour, but the honour of God in all he said or did. He sought not his own interest, but the in-

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terest of his Lord, spreading knowledge, holiness, and happiness, as far as he possibly could. He sought not his own pleasure, but studied to *please all men, for their good, to edification*; and to please Him that had called him to his kingdom and glory. And yet it is certain, he found the greatest pleasure in pleasing God and his neighbour. For nothing could give an higher delight than this, to his pious and benevolent mind.

"In the meantime he was a man of peace, and spared no pains to restore it where it was broken. He gave numberless proofs of this amiable disposition.—When we were at Trevecka (to mention but one instance), two of the students were bitterly prejudiced against each other. He took them into a room by themselves, reasoned with them, wept over them, and at last prevailed. Their hearts were broken; they were melted down; they fell upon each other's necks and wept aloud.

"The pains which he took to make peace at the Leeds Conference, will not easily be forgotten. And although he could not prevail so far as might have been desired, yet his labour was not in vain.

"But I do not attempt his full character. I will only add what the Apostle recommends to the Phillippians, was exactly copied by him. He was *blameless and harmless, a Son of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse gene-*

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ration; shining among them as a light in the world."

I think one talent wherewith God had endued Mr. Fletcher, has not been sufficiently noted yet. I mean his *courtesy;* in which there was not the least touch either of art or affectation. It was pure and genuine, and sweetly constrained him to behave to every one (although particularly to inferiors), in a manner not to be described—with so inexpressible a mixture of humility, love, and respect. This directed his words, the tone of his voice, his looks, his whole attitude, his every motion. This seems to be intended by St. Paul, in those words, *Ouk achemonei.* Not so well expressed in our translation by, "*Behaveth not itself unseemly.*" Do not these words literally mean, "*Is not ill-bred*"? Behaves on all occasions with decency and good-breeding? Certainly so did Mr. Fletcher. Never did any man more perfectly suit his whole behaviour to the persons and the occasion. So that one might apply to him with great propriety the words of the ancient poet:

Illum quicquid agit, quoquo vestigia tendit
Componit furtim subsequiturque Decor.

I cannot translate this; but I can give the English reader a parallel, and more than a parallel:

Grace was in all his steps, heaven in his eye,
In all his gestures sanctity and love.

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CHAPTER X.

His Death.

"SOME time before he was taken ill" (says Mrs. Fletcher), "he mentioned to me a peculiar manifestation of love, which he received in his own house, with the application of those words, '*Thou shalt walk with me in white.*' He added, 'It is not a little thing so to hang upon God by faith, as to feel no departure from him, and no rising in the heart against him. But this does not satisfy *me*. I often feel something far beyond this. Yea, I sometimes find such gleams of light and love, such wafts, as it were, of the heavenly air! so powerful as if they would just then take my soul with them to glory. But *I am not filled*. I want to be filled with all the fulness of God.' In conformity to these sentiments, when he was in his last illness, he expressed himself thus, '*I am filled*, most sweetly fillled.' This conveyed much to my mind, as I understand by it the accomplishment of his large desires.

"Some time before the beginning of his last sickness, he was peculiarly penetrated with the nearness of eternity. There was scarce an hour in which he was not calling upon us, to drop every

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thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing, but the drinking deeper into God. We spent much time in wrestling with God, and were led in a peculiar manner, to abandon our whole selves, our souls and bodies, into the hands of God; ready to do, and willing to suffer whatever was well pleasing to him.

"And now the time drew near, when his faith was to be called to its last grand exercise; that, eyeing his Lord, he might

> True in the fiery trial prove,
> And pay him back his dying love.

A little before, being on his kees in prayer for light whether he* should go to London or not. The answer to him seemed to be, 'Not to London, but to thy grave.' When he acquainted me with this, he said, with a heavenly smile, 'Satan would represent it to me as something dreadful, enforcing those words, '*The cold grave! the cold grave!*' On the Sunday following (I think it was the next day), that anthem was sung in the church, '*The Lord is my Shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in green pastures, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. He shall convert my soul, and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and*

* I verily believe, if he had then gone to London, he would have been alive at this day. But I blame no one for thinking otherwise.

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thy staff shall comfort me. Thou shalt prepare a table before me, against them that trouble me. Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.'

"In his return home, he observed in how uncommon a degree those words had been blest to his soul. And from that very time, I do not remember to have seen in him the least marks of temptation. He showed an unusual cheerfulness and liveliness in every part of his work; and seemed to increase in strength of body, as well as in strength of soul. Truly it was to him according to his faith. He *feared no evil.* And *his cup was filled* with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

"On Thursday, August 4, he was employed in the work of God from three in the afternoon, till nine at night. When he came home, he said, 'I have taken cold;' but seemed not to regard it. He was far from well on Friday and Saturday; but was uncommonly drawn out in prayer. On Saturday night he was abundantly worse, and his fever appeared very strong. I begged that he would by no means think of going to church in the morning. But he told me, it was the will of the Lord; in which case I never dared to persuade. In reading prayers he was very near fainting away. I got through the crowd, and entreated him to come out of the desk. But he let me and others know in his sweet manner, That we were not to interrupt

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the order of God. I then silently retired to my pew, where all around me were in tears. When the windows were opened, by which he appeared to be a little refreshed, he went on; and then preached, with a strength and recollection that surprised us all.

"After sermon he walked up to the communion-table uttering these words, 'I am going to throw myself under the wings of the Cherubim, before the Mercy-seat.' The service lasted till near two. Sometimes he was constrained to stop—being hardly able to stand upon his feet. The people were deeply affected, which they were not able to conceal—groans and weeping were on every side. Gracious Lord! How was it my soul was kept so calm in the midst of the most tender feelings! Notwithstanding his extreme weakness, he gave out several verses of hymns, and lively sentences of exhortation. As soon as ever the service was over, we hurried him to bed. When he lay down, nature had been quite exhausted, he immediately fainted away. He afterwards dropt into a sleep for some time; and on waking, cried out, with a pleasant smile, 'Now, my dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work. He never fails me when I trust in him.' Having ate a little dinner he dozed most of the evening, now and then waking, with the praises of God in his mouth. At night his fever returned, but it was not violent; and yet his strength decreased amazingly. On

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Monday and Tuesday we had a little paradise together. He lay on a couch in the study; and though often changing posture, was sweetly pleasant, and frequently slept a good while together. When he was awake, he delighted in hearing me read hymns, and treatises on faith and love. His words were all animating, and his patience beyond expression. When he had a very nauseous medicine to take, he seemed to enjoy the cross, according to a word, which he was used often to repeat, 'We are to seek a perfect conformity to the will of God, and leave him to give us pleasure or pain, as it seemeth him good.'

"I asked him, whether he had any advice to leave me, if he should be taken from me. He replied, 'I have nothing particular to say: the Lord will open all before thee.' I said, 'Have you any conviction that God is about to take you.' He said, 'No, not in particular. Only I always see death so inexpressibly near, that we both seem to stand on the verge of eternity.' While he slept a little, I besought the Lord, if it was his good pleasure, to spare him to me a little longer. But my prayer seemed to have no wings; and I could not help mingling continually therewith, Lord give me perfect resignation! This uncertainty made me tremble, lest God was going to put into my hands the bitter cup with which he lately threatened my husband. Some weeks before, I myself was ill of a fever, and not without danger. My husband

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then felt the whole parting scene, and struggled for perfect resignation. He said, 'O Polly, shall I ever see the day when thou must be carried out to bury! How will the little things which thy tender care has prepared for me, in every part of the house, wound and distress me! How is it? I think I feel jealousy! I am jealous of the worms! I seem to shrink at the thought of giving my dear Polly to the worms.'

"Now all these reflections returned upon my heart, with the weight of a mill-stone. I cried to the Lord, and these words were deeply impressed on my spirit, '*Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory.*' This promise was full of comfort to my soul. I saw that in Christ's immediate presence was our home, and that we should have our re-union in being deeply centred in him. I received it as a fresh marriage for eternity —as such I trust for ever to hold it. All that day, whenever I thought of the expression, '*to behold my glory,*' it seemed to wipe away every tear, and was as the ring whereby we were joined anew.

"Awaking sometime after, he said, 'Polly, I have been thinking it was Israel's fault that they asked for *signs*. We will not do so; but abandoning our whole selves to the will of God, will lie patiently before him; assured that he will do all things well."

"'My dear love,' said I, 'if ever I have done or

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said any thing to grieve thee, how will the remembrance wound my heart, if thou shouldst be taken from me!' He entreated me with inexpressible tenderness, not to allow the thought, declaring his thankfulness for our union, in a variety of words written on my heart, as with the adamantine pen of friendship deeply dipt in blood.

"On Wednesday, after groaning all day long, under the weight of the power of God, he told me he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of those words, *God is love*, as he could never be able to express. 'It fills my heart,' said he, 'every moment. O Polly, my dear Polly, *God is love!* Shout! shout aloud! I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth! But it seems as if I could not speak much longer. Let us fix on a sign between ourselves. 'Now,' said he, tapping me twice with his finger, 'I mean, God is love. And we will draw each other into God. Observe! By this we will draw each other into God.'

"Sally coming in, he cried out, 'O Sally, God is love! Shout both of you! I want to hear you shout his praise!' All this time the medical friend who attended him diligently, hoped he was in no danger; as he had no headache, but much sleep without the least delirium, and an almost regular pulse. So was the disease, though commissioned to take his life, restrained by the power of God.

"On Thursday his speech began to fail. While

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he was able, he spoke to all that came in his way. Hearing that a stranger was in the house, he ordered her to be called up; but the uttering only two sentences made him ready to faint away. And while he had any power of speech, he would not be silent to his friendly doctor. 'O Sir,' said he, 'you take much thought for my body; permit me to take thought for your soul!' When I could scarce understand any thing he said, I spoke these words, '*God is love.*' Instantly, as if all his powers were awakened, he broke out in a rapture, 'God is Love! Love! Love! O, for that gust of praise! I want to sound!'—Here his voice again failed. All this time he was in much pain, and suffered many ways; but still with such unutterable patience, as none but those that were present can conceive. If I did but name his sufferings, he would smile and make the sign.

"On Friday, observing his body covered with spots, I felt a sword pierce through my soul. As I was kneeling by his side, with my hand in his, entreating the Lord to be with us in this tremendous hour, he strove to say many things, but could not articulate the words. All he could do was to press my hand, and frequently repeat the sign. At last he breathed out, 'Head of the Church, be head to my wife!'

"When I was forced to leave him for a few moments, Sally said to him, 'My dear master, do you know me?' He replied, 'God will put his right

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hand under you.' She added, 'O my dear master, should you be taken away, what a disconsolate creature, will my poor dear mistress be!' He replied 'God will be her all in all!'

"He always took a peculiar pleasure in repeating or hearing those words:

> Jesu's love through earth and skies,
> Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries.

Whenever I repeated them to him, he would answer 'Boundless! boundless! boundless!' He now added, though not without much difficulty:

> Mercy's full power I soon shall prove,
> Lov'd with an everlasting love.

"On Saturday in the afternoon, his fever seemed quite off, and a few friends standing near his bed, he reached his hand to each, and looking on a minister, said, 'Are you ready to assist to-morrow?' His recollection surprised us, as the day of the week had not been named in the room. Many were of opinion he would recover; and one of them said to him, 'Do you think the Lord will raise you up?' He strove to answer, and could just pronounce, 'Raise me up in the resurr—.' Meaning in the resurrection. To another who asked the same question, he said, 'I leave it all to God.'

"In the evening the fever came again, and with greater violence than ever. The *mucus* then falling on his throat, almost strangled him. It was supposed, the same painful symptom would grow

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more and more violent to the last. As I felt this exquisitely, I cried to the Lord to remove it. And glory be to his name, he did! From that time it returned no more.

"As night drew on, I perceived him dying very fast. His fingers could hardly make the sign, which he scarce ever forgot; and his speech seemed quite gone. I said, 'My dear creature, I ask not for myself: *I know thy soul;* but for the sake of others, if Jesus is very present with thee, lift up thy right hand.' Immediately he did. 'If the prospect of glory sweetly opens before thee, repeat the sign.' He instantly raised it again, and in half a minute a second time. He then threw it up, as if he would reach the top of the bed. After this, his hands moved no more. But on my saying, 'Art thou in pain?' He answered, 'No.' From this time he lay in a kind of sleep, though with his eyes open and fixt. For the most part he sat upright, against pillows, with his head a little inclining to one side. And so remarkably composed, yea, triumphant was his countenance, that the least trace of death was scarce discernible in it. Twenty-four hours he was in this situation, breathing like a person in common sleep. About thirty-five minutes past ten on Sunday night, August 14, his precious soul entered into the joy of his Lord, without one struggle or groan, in the fifty-sixth year of his age.

"And here I break off my mournful story; but

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on my bleeding heart, the fair picture of his heavenly excellencies will be for ever drawn. When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavours to seek and save the lost, his diligence in the employment of his time, his Christ-like condescension towards me, and his uninterrupted converse with heaven, I may well be allowed to add, my loss is beyond the power of words to paint. I have often gone through deep waters; but all my afflictions were nothing to this. Well, I want no pleasant prospect but upwards; nor any thing whereon to fix my hope, but immortality.

"From the time I have had the happiness and honour of being with him, every day more and more convinced me he was the Christian. I saw, I loved in him, the image of my Saviour, and thought myself the happiest of women, in the possession of the most sympathizing and heavenly friend. My sorrow bears a due proportion. But it is alleviated by that thought, '*United in God, we cannot be divided.*' No, we are of one household still: we are joined in Him as our centre, *of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.* It is said of New Testament believers, '*they are come to the spirits of just men made perfect*;' to the glorious privilege of communion with the church triumphant. But this is far more apparent to the eyes of celestial spirits than to ours, which are yet veiled with flesh and blood. Yet as there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and as the

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prayers of saints, still on earth, are represented by incense in the hands of the elders, I can only consider departed spirits and ministering angels, as one innumerable company, continually surrounding us. And are they not as nearly united to their fellow-soldiers now, as when they were in the body? What should hinder? Gratitude and affection are natives of heaven, and live for ever there. Forgetfulness is a property of mortality, and drops off with the body. Therefore, they that loved us in the Lord, will surely love us for ever:—can any thing material interrupt the light or presence of a spirit? Nay,

> Walls within walls no more the passage bar,
> Than unopposing space of liquid air.

"On the 17th, his remains were deposited in Madeley church-yard, amidst the tears and lamentations of thousands. The service was performed by the Rev. Mr. Hatton, rector of Waters-Upton, whom God enabled to speak in a pathetic manner to the weeping flock. In the conclusion, at my request, he read the following paper:

"As it was the desire of my beloved husband to be buried in this plain manner, so, out of tenderness he begged that I might not be present. And in every thing I would obey him.

"Permit me then, by the mouth of a friend, to bear an open testimony, to the glory of God;—that I, who have known him in the most perfect manner, am constrained to declare, that I never

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knew any one walk so closely in the ways of God as he did. The Lord gave him a conscience tender as the apple of an eye. And he literally preferred the interest of every one to his own.

"He was rigidly just, and perfectly loose from attachment to the world. He shared his all with the poor, who lay so close to his heart, that at the approach of death, when he could not speak without difficulty, he cried out, '*O my poor! What will become of my poor?*' He was blest with so great a degree of humility, as is scarce to be found. I am witness how often he has rejoiced in being treated with contempt. Indeed it seemed the very food of his soul—to be little and unknown.

"His zeal for souls I need not tell you. Let the labours of twenty-five years, and a martyr's death in the conclusion, imprint it on your hearts. His diligent visiting of the sick, occasioned the fever, which by God's commission, tore him from you and me. And his vehement desire to take his last leave of you with dying lips and hands, gave, it is supposed, the finishing stroke, by preparing his blood for putrefaction. Thus has he lived and died your servant. And will any of you refuse to meet him at God's right hand in that day?

"He walked with death always in sight. About two months ago, he came to me and said, 'My dear love, I know not how it is, but I have a

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strange impression, death is near us, as if it were to be some sudden stroke upon one of us. And it draws out all my soul in prayer, that we may be ready.' He then broke out, 'Lord, prepare the soul thou wilt call! And O! stand by the poor disconsolate one that shall be left behind.'

"A few days before his departure, he was filled with love in an uncommon manner. The same he testified as long as he had a voice, and continued to the end by a most lamb-like patience, in which he smiled over death, and set his last seal to the glorious truths he had so long preached among you.

"Three years, nine months, and two days, I have possessed my heavenly-minded husband. But now the sun of my earthly joys is set for ever, and my soul filled with an anguish, which only finds its consolation in a total resignation to the will of God. When I was asking the Lord, if he pleased to spare him to me a little longer, the following promise was imprest on my mind, '*Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory!*' Lord, hasten the time."

There is little need of adding any farther character of this man of God, to the foregoing account, given by one who wrote out of the fulness of her heart. I would observe, that for many years, I despaired of finding any inhabitant of Great Britain, that could stand in any degree of comparison with Gregory Lopez, or Monsieur de Renty. But

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let any impartial person judge, if Mr. Fletcher was at all inferior to them. Did he not experience as deep communion with God, and as high a measure of inward holiness, as was experienced by either one or the other of those burning and shining lights! And it is certain his outward light shone before men, with full as bright a lustre as theirs. But if any would draw a parallel between them, there are two circumstances which should be well observed. One is, we are not assured that the writers of *their* lives did not extenuate, if not suppress their faults. And some faults we are assured there were, namely, some touches of superstition, and some of idolatry—as the worship of images, angels, and saints—the Virgin Mary in particular. But I have not suppressed, or even extenuated, any thing in Mr. Fletcher's life. Indeed I know nothing that needed to be extenuated, much less to be suppressed. A second circumstance is, that the writers of *their* lives could not have so full a knowledge of them as I, and much more Mrs. Fletcher had, being an eye and ear witness of his whole conduct. Consequently *we knew* that his life was not sullied with any taint of idolatry or superstition. I was intimately acquainted with him for thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And in all that time, I never heard him speak an improper word, or saw him do an improper action. To conclude. Within four

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score years I have known many excellent men—holy in heart and life. But one equal to him I have not known—one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblameable a man in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America. Nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity.

Yet it is possible *we* may be such as he was. Let us then endeavour to follow him, as he followed Christ. For—

"He was one of the pilgrim train;
A solemn, reverend, and religious man.
His eye diffused a venerable grace,
And charity itself was in his face.
Rich was his soul, though his attire was poor,
As God had cloth'd his own ambassador;
For such on earth his blest Redeemer bore.
Fifty-six years he liv'd: and might have past
Fifty-six more, but that he liv'd too fast;
Refined himself to soul, to curb the sense,
And made almost a sin of abstinence:
Yet had his aspect nothing of severe,
But such a face as promis'd him sincere.
Nothing reserv'd or sullen was to see;
But sweet regards and pleasing sanctity:
Mild was his accent, and his action free.
With eloquence innate his tongue was arm'd;
Though harsh the precept, yet the people charm'd.
For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upward to the sky;
And oft with holy hymns he charm'd their ears;
A music more melodious than the spheres;
For David left him when he went to rest,
His lyre; and after him he sung the best.
He bore his great commission in his look,
But sweetly tempered awe, and softened all he spoke.
He preach'd the joys of heaven, and pains of hell,
And warn'd the sinner with becoming zeal;

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But on eternal mercy lov'd to dwell.
He taught the Gospel rather than the Law,
And forc'd himself to drive, but lov'd to draw.
For fear but freezes minds; but love, like heat,
Exhales the soul sublime to seek her native seat.
To threats the stubborn sinner oft is heard,
Wrapp'd in his crimes, against the storm prepared;
But when the milder beams of mercy play,
He melts and throws his cumbrous cloak away.
Lightning and thunder, Heav'ns artillery,
As harbingers before the Almighty fly:
Those but proclaim his style, and disappear;
The stiller sound succeeds, and God is there!
Though he had little, he had some to spare,
To feed the famish'd, and to clothe the bare;
For mortified he was to that degree,
A poorer than himself he would not see.
Wide was his parish, not contracted close
In streets, but here and there a straggling house:
Yet still he was at hand without request,
To serve the sick, to succour the distress'd;
Tempting on foot alone, without affright,
The dangers of a dark tempestuous night.
All this the meek good man perform'd alone,
Nor spar'd his pains, for curate he had none.
The proud he tam'd, the penitent he cheer'd;
Nor to rebuke the rich offender fear'd.
His preaching much, but more his practice wrought,
A living sermon of the truths he taught.
For this by rules severe his life he squar'd,
That all might see the doctrines that they heard:
For priests, he said, are patterns for the rest;
The gold of heaven, who bear the God impress'd;
But when the precious coin is kept unclean,
The Sovereign's image is no longer seen.
If they be foul, on whom the people trust,
Well may the baser brass contract a rust.
The prelate for his holy life he priz'd;
The worldly pomp of prelacy despis'd.
His Saviour came not with a gaudy show,
Nor was his kingdom of the world below.
Patience in want, and poverty of mind,
These marks of church and churchmen he designed,
And living taught, and dying left behind.

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Such was the saint, that shone with every grace,
Reflecting, Moses-like, his Maker's face.
God saw his image lively was express'd;
And his own work, as in creation bless'd."

DRYDEN.

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HIS EPITAPH.

Here lies the Body of
The Rev. JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE,
Vicar of Madeley,
Who was born at Nyon, in Switzerland,
September the 12th, 1729,
And finished his course, August 14th, 1785,
In this Village:
Where his unexampled Labours
Will never be forgotten.
He exercised his Ministry for the space of
Twenty-five Years
In this Parish,
With uncommon Zeal and Ability.
But though many believed his Report,
Yet he might with justice have adopted the
Lamentation of the Prophet,
All the day long have I stretched out my hands
Unto a disobedient and gainsaying People:
Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord,
And my Work with my God.

THE END.

WILLIAM MILNER, PRINTER, CHEAPSIDE, HALIFAX.

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